

THE GOOD MAN.—See page 213.

THE LONDON READER

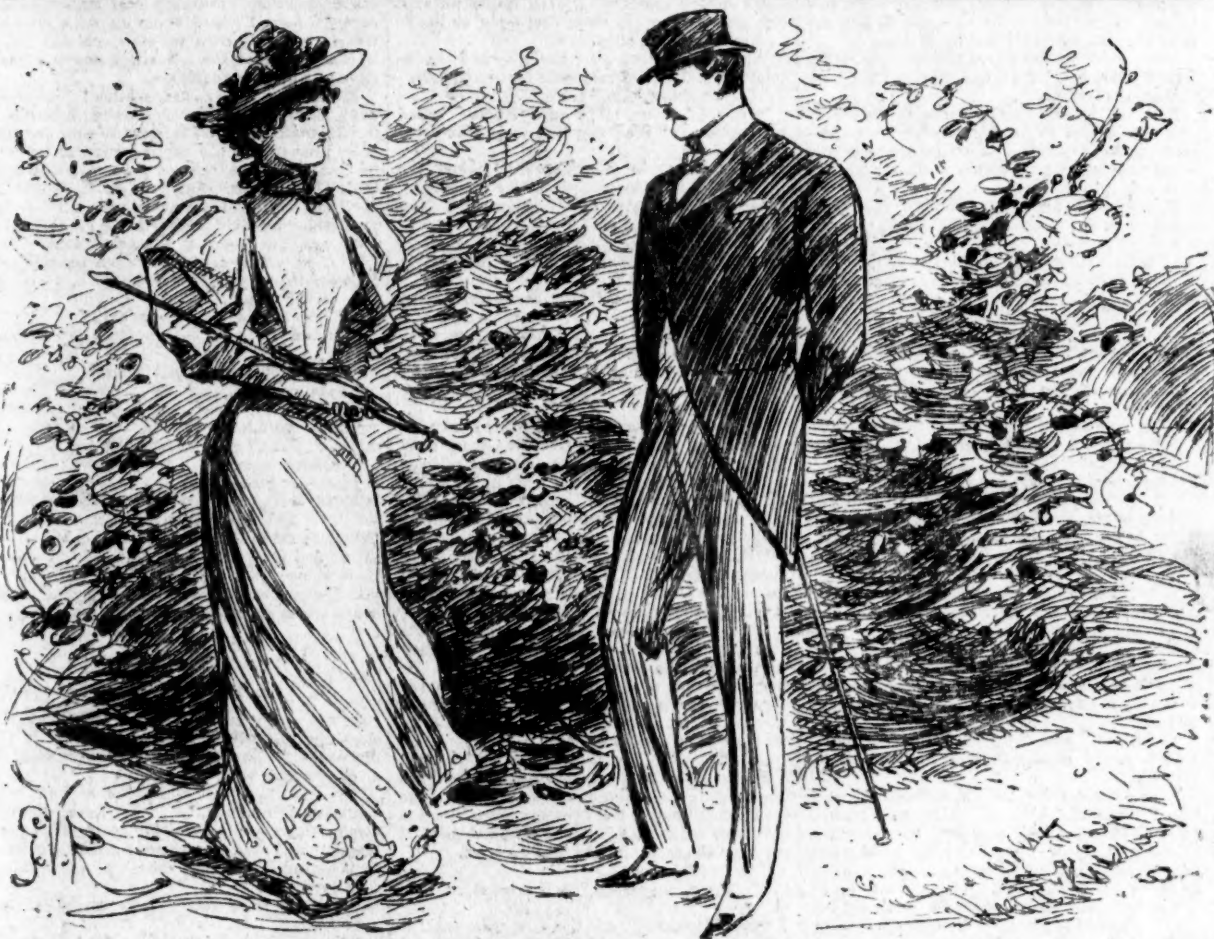
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"YOU KNOW ME NOW. I AM FRED KING, THE MAN WHOM YOU PROMISED TO MARRY!"

HER BITTER SORROW.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was stitch, stitch, stitch, "the song of the shirt," from morning till night. Mother and daughter sat over their tedious work until their tired eyes could scarce see the thread.

Yet they did not dare leave off until a certain quantity was done. Where would be to-morrow's food? For scant, indeed, was the payment.

The work must be of the neatest. It must be returned to the shop exactly at the appointed time; but for all this labour, for all the long hours, when the incessant click of the needle only was to be heard, those bent heads were too intent, were, indeed, working for dear life.

They could not afford to lose time in talking, yet they could but barely support themselves by their needle.

The mother looked pale and careworn. The

girl was very fragile; and no wonder, living in the quarter they did.

You can get but very little air in some of the narrow streets in Bermondsey. And what is breathed is not of the freshest. The sickly odour of the tan yards, and worse again, the skindressers, is not calculated to put roses on pale cheeks.

Yet the battle of life must be fought wherever our lot is cast, whether in Bermondsey or Belgravia. It is often as hard in one as the other; though people may, to all appearance, be rich in this world's store. Are they happy?

There is barely a home without a skeleton of some shape or other, and perhaps the Balgravian skeletons are oftentimes the worst.

Poverty is hideous to look at. But many people would give up all their wealth, rank, everything, and cheerfully accept poverty to be easy in mind.

"Nellie, you will be late, I am afraid, in getting this work finished. Do you think the shop will be closed?"

"No, mother. If I hasten I think I shall be in time. I can go to the side door. I will tell the forewoman there was so much to be done. How

long do you think we shall now be before completing it?"

"Half-an-hour, quite," returned the mother.

"And it will leave me three-quarters to walk in. Oh, yes, I can do it by that time; and, mother, shall I say we want the money?"

"You must, child, or we shall be without fire. Good gracious! how hardly this poverty comes on one. Oh, Nellie! what prospects I married with; and then he, your father, to desert me."

"Prospects, mother? you say. Why he was beneath you in every way."

"In position, yes, child. But what had my family been that they should turn from him? They were people well off, but by their own industry and ought not to have placed any obstacle on our marriage."

"Ah, well! It is twelve years to-morrow since he went."

"Well, never mind him, mother; he is no father of mine."

The mother looked up sharply.

"What makes you say so?" she asked.

"Because I will never own him. I don't suppose it will cause him any grief. But I certainly will never call him father. I have never

felt any longing to see him. Have never cared whether he were alive or dead—he is not worth one thought—so let us not mention his name any more. For it is always the cause of angry words between you and me, mother, which had better be avoided. I am afraid I shall be late with the work."

"Put on your hat; I can finish it. But you have had no tea!"

"Never mind, that will do when I return."

She was quickly ready; and although her dress was of the poorest, she was not one to be easily passed by; her figure was tall and straight, her complexion pale and clear, her hair black as a raven's wing, while her eyes, as if in exact contradiction, were blue, large and clear.

Nellie Forrester was indeed a beauty, and hardly fitting was it for her to walk through the busy thoroughfares alone.

Now she walked quickly on with her parcel over the bridge so thickly thronged with passengers, on to the city, where the wholesale house from which they obtained their work was situated.

Barely in time; they were closing the premises, and the forewoman whom Nellie usually saw was just about leaving.

"Oh, Miss Forrester, I gave you up by this time. You are late. I can do nothing for you till the morning."

This brief conversation took place at the door; the porter was putting up the shutters. A man, tall and shabby-looking, stood near him, and watched the two women intently.

As Nellie left, the shabby man turned to the other,—

"Who was that girl just gone?"

"One of the outdoor workers."

"Her name?" inquired the man.

"Forrester, I think," was the answer.

The man murmured his thanks and walked sharply after the retreating figure of the girl, whom he kept in sight until she reached home.

"Mother, I have not brought the money. She was just leaving, and I must go again."

"Dear me, how hard to be sure it is to be poor! Nellie, why don't you marry Fred King?"

"Mother, how can you keep for ever urging me to that. I could never bear to be his wife—he is so common."

"Common, you say! But for him I expect we should get no work at all. He could keep you very well."

"I daresay," said the girl, dreamily; "but I cannot marry him. I have told him so repeatedly."

"He will not take 'no' for an answer," said Mrs. Forrester. "And, oh! Nellie, see what you could do for me. See," she cried, extending her thin hands, "how I am dying by inches, and without even the necessities that I ought to have. Dying by inches, Nellie, and you could save me!"

"So be it, mother!" answered her daughter.

"If I can add to your comfort and happiness by marrying Fred King then I will do so. If he asks me again I'll accept him."

"I'm sure I should be glad. And Nellie, if you had accepted him months ago how much misery it would have saved!"

Nellie heaved a sigh. Toil, toil as she did, why must she now give even her happiness away! Fred King, who held a position of trust in one of the wholesale houses from which they received work, and who had paid a great deal of attention to Nellie from the first time he had met her, was no doubt a good chance as his position went, but for a husband—Nellie shrank from the thought.

That evening Fred King came, and Mrs. Forrester soon put him in possession of Nellie's altered feelings, when for the third time he asked her to be his wife.

He was a tall man, with not bad features, but a certain unpleasant way of never looking at people while speaking.

"Well, Nellie, my dear, I'll take that long coveted kiss," he said, suiting the action to the word. But he scowled as he saw the girl take her handkerchief as if she would wipe away the impression. "However," he said to himself, "she was a prize worth having, and he could afford to be a little lenient."

"I'm not going to wait a long time, Nell. Mind, a couple of months at the farthest."

Nellie acquiesced indifferently to all he proposed. What mattered it whether she sold herself in two months or two years! She had agreed to the bargain.

Mr. King certainly was delighted at the unlooked for piece of good fortune, as he called Nellie's change of mind. And bidding her an affectionate adieu, which she did not appreciate, he left the house.

Next morning the postman was later than usual. It was not often he knocked at so many doors on one morning; and as Nellie watched him he came towards their door—yes, no doubt for her, from Fred King.

What was her surprise as she opened the envelope to find a crisp bank-note for ten pounds.

"I won't accept this," she said.

"How ridiculous, to be sure, Nellie!" cried her mother. "Fred may not have sent it at all."

"Who, then, do you suppose?" asked the girl, looking over her shoulder at her mother.

"It may be—may be—" stammered Mrs. Forrester, "your father!"

"Oh! mother, don't try and deceive yourself—you know that is impossible. He is more likely to take than to give."

Angry words followed, Mrs. Forrester keeping possession of the note. It was time for Nellie to go to the City. Putting her hat on, without a word she left the house and proceeded to the shop, obtained the money; but there was no more work ready—business was very dull.

Sadly she returned. Her mother was still angry. She gave her the money—then more angry words, and Nellie again left the house, meeting the landlady.

"Nothing wrong, Miss Forrester, is there?"

"Only mother in a bad temper, Mrs. Jones," Nellie said, and passed on.

"I'll see if I can get some work," she murmured to herself. "Try the other people, and then perhaps she will cheer up a little. I won't waste my time walking about the streets."

Three o'clock that afternoon a dense fog was over London—so dense many people lost their way, among the number Nellie Forrester. It was quite five o'clock when she reached her home, her eyes smarting, and feeling altogether very miserable. She walked quietly in and up the stairs, and opened the door.

That same evening a flying figure rushed down the street towards the river, the fog being so thick a man coming from the opposite direction never saw the woman in her headlong flight, but suddenly she came straight into his arms.

"Hullo!" he said.

"I beg your pardon," said a voice, as if in terror.

"Miss Forrester," said the man, who was the landlady's son.

"For Heaven's sake don't stop me!" she cried, and wrenched herself from his arms, still keeping straight for the river.

The man stopped, turned round; but now could see nothing of her.

"Wonder what she's up to! P'raps her mother's ill, and she's rushing for the doctor and turned the wrong way; she'll go clean into the river, and be drowned for sure."

He went home—the girl continued her wild course.

"Better so, better so! After the horrors of the day—after all I have gone through, 'twere indeed best. On—on to the river, it will hide me for ever; better out of the world than in!"

But she stumbled against something; she knew she was close to the water's edge; she could hear the splash as it surged up nearly at her feet, though she could not see an inch before her.

Then, for the first time, came the horror of self-destruction. "Oh! Heaven! if I could only hide myself away unknown—hide my head! But where—where! unless in the dark waters!"

Calmer came her thoughts; her tears now fell fast. She had grasped in her hands whatever she had stumbled over, as if it had helped her

from perpetrating that dreadful act. It was a bag, she could feel that—a lady's hand-bag. She felt for the clasp, it yielded to the pressure of her fingers; there was a purse inside that she could also feel. She closed the bag. Was this sent for her, to keep her from that black despair? Yes, it must have been; she would accept it as such. But caution now was wanted. How she blessed the fog for shielding her; and yet she hardly knew but every minute she might find a watery grave.

She was still near the water; she knew the wharves were along there; and by keeping close she might come to the next opening and so escape. On—on! it was wearying work; but at last she was away from the river, and she knew by the glitter of the gas lamps she was once more in a busy thoroughfare.

Yes, here was the railway station! She knew not what to do. The waiting-room, with its bright fire, looked inviting. She went in—no one was there; she opened the bag and searched the contents, and her face for some time was hard and set. Then, without further ado, she alight the bag, and making her way to the office, asked what time she could obtain her luggage in the morning. Then, turning to a porter, said,—

"On second thoughts take them to the hotel. I'll sleep there to-night, and go on to Paddington in a cab to-morrow."

"Where is your luggage, ma'am!"

"In the cloak-room—five large trunks and wraps."

"You're not the lady as left 'em."

"I am her maid," was the answer; "she has gone on to some friends near Paddington; and I ought to have followed; but I must early to-morrow; I can't go in this terrible fog."

The boxes were taken to the hotel; and the next morning the maid left in a cab, another following with the luggage, for it was too much for one. And when at Paddington, a first-class ticket was taken for a wayside station in Devonshire; and upon the destination being reached, there stepped out a young widow lady, closely veiled, whose luggage was the subject of much conversation among the porters.

CHAPTER II.

It was a picturesque old house, standing on the slope of a hill, with a view of the river in the distance—and Mrs. Lorton, its mistress, watched anxiously from the windows.

"Strange, Max," she said to her nephew, who was standing near the fire, "that Leah does not come. Can anything have happened, think you? She promised to send a telegram when she arrived in England. You say the ship was signalled four days ago!"

"Yes, my dear aunt; very reminds of the young lady!"

"Do you think she can be ill, Max? They gave so bad an account of her. She ought to have had some one so have come all the way with her, poor girl."

"Ease your mind, aunt. A fly from the station I can see; it has just got to the bend of the road."

The carriage soon drew up at the hall.

"Ah! my dear, my dear!" said the old lady as she threw her arms round the black-robed, slender figure, that sank into a chair overcome with emotion.

Mrs. Lorton tenderly took off the widow's bonnet, and smoothed the blue-black hair with a gentle motherly hand, while her heart was rent in very anguish at the sobs which shook the slight frame.

"Come, come, Leah, my dear, don't be so broken-hearted. Remember, there is someone left to love you, though it is very sad—not a year since you married, and then to lose him! But, my dear, it has been a severe loss to me, though I still remember yours is the saddest. But Leah, it is all, perhaps, for the best; no one on this earth, my dear, knows for what wise purpose he was taken."

Still that dreadful sobbing went on, and Mrs. Lorton had some trouble in pacifying her. At

length she grew a little more calm, and the old lady said, smilingly,—

"Now we won't talk any more about sad things. But tell me why you are so late? We expected you days ago."

"We were overdue; and then I was detained a night in London. the fog was so thick yesterday. I came to Plymouth and stayed the night, not knowing how far it was."

"Ah, my dear, I should have come to London and met you—I ought to have done so; but then you see we might have been at cross purposes. I should not have known you, or you me. But now you are here, you'll consider this your home now, Leah; and, remember, it used to be your husband's boyhood's home."

"No other hardly did he know, nor Max either; though Max has his father and mother living, still he came when poor Frank left me. Now, dear Leah, you shall be nice and cosy for the rest of the afternoon. Would you like to see Max now or wait?"

"I would sooner see him now, please; perhaps he will think me unkind."

"Max!" called Mrs. Lorton, "come! Leah wishes to make your acquaintance."

"Oh, please aunt, what must I call him, Max or—"

"Or Mr. Mowbray. Whichever you like, dear. Ah, here he is!"

Max Mowbray came forward, and as he looked at his cousin's widow he started.

"Good gracious! the likeness is marvellous!"

"To whom?" asked his aunt.

"Well, my dear aunt, now you have extracted a tiny secret from me. It is now quite six or eight months ago, when I was in the City, and a girl who was poorly dressed was accosted very roughly by some men. I should have interfered, but just then they desisted. However, I went up to her, and asked if I might see her in safety, and after a few words she thanked me, and I left her when I knew she was safe from the roughs. No sooner had she gone than I would have given anything to have known who she was."

"Did you fall in love, Max?" asked his aunt, laughingly.

"With a work-girl!" he said, reproachfully.

"Then why wish to know where she lived?"

"I should have liked her face painted; and I daresay she would have been only too glad of my offer."

"And do I put you in mind of her, Mr. Mowbray?" asked Leah.

"Very much so; but you are paler, and, I fancy, taller, but a startling likeness. I had forgotten in your coming all about my work-girl until I saw you sitting there."

"Very strange!" said the young widow, coldly. "Dear aunt, you do not mind me resting, I am so weary!"

"My dear Leah, you look dreadfully. Come, my child, to your room, and you shall see if I have not made it look pretty for you. Though I'm an old woman now, I've not forgotten how to make a room look tasteful."

"Oh, aunt! thank you for all your goodness! I only hope I may prove worthy the attention you have lavished on me."

She kissed the old lady; and then, when alone, sank into an easy chair. After locking the doors, she took out a bag in which were numerous papers and letters, and read them through, though she knew them by heart.

"I wish I could get a paper and see what has taken place. I dare not ask for one, it might arouse their suspicions; but I must look on this now quite as my home. It is not likely anybody will ever recognise me. She seemed to have no friends, poor thing! But there, it is madness to think so much of it. It will turn my brain. And to think he should remember the work-girl, who was not good enough for a gentleman to marry. He, of course, will marry a lady. Oh! my day-dreams, how they have been shattered! I lived on the bare memory for months. For what? A pet fancy of mine, thinking he would arrive some day a second King Cophetua. The past must be a blank; the future is before me bright enough. I should be happy."

The first night Leah Lorton spent in Devonshire very little sleep came to her eyes. In the

morning her restlessness showed itself in her increased pallor, and a weariness seemed over her as she made her appearance at the table.

"She is in bad health," said Max Mowbray, speaking to his aunt when alone. "I should say she is in consumption."

"Oh, Max, it cannot be possible! Don't say that, my dear boy. Oh, I can love poor Frank's wife as much as ever he did, poor fellow! Did her parents die of consumption, do you know? I should like to find out."

"I can easily do that, aunt; I know a man out there. He may not have been acquainted with the family, but he could soon get information."

"Oh, I wish you would write to her, Max."

"What was her name before she married?"

"Leah Sylvester. Her father was, I heard, at a college. She, of course you know, was born in India, but seems to have been very friendless when Frank first met her at a friend's house, whose regiment now has been ordered somewhere else abroad, I believe. Only a year ago, you see, Max. Poor girl—married, and a widow now six months. It is Providence, I suppose."

"Where is she now, aunt?"

"In the breakfast-room; go and talk to her, try and make her cheerful. I don't think you seem inclined to get on well together."

"Your fancy, my dear aunt," answered her nephew, as he left the room.

He made his way to the breakfast-room and softly turned the handle of the door. There, with her beautiful head thrown back, lay Leah Lorton, to all appearances dead, and in her hand was grasped a newspaper.

He quickly raised her, and was relieved when he found she had but fainted. Then he rang for assistance, but he took the newspaper from her hand, noting the page with intention of looking through the columns when an opportunity afforded it.

Leah recovered, and murmuring something about not being well, allowed Mrs. Lorton, who had come in in terror, to lead her to her room, while Max Mowbray now ran his eye down the print.

"Murder of a mother by her daughter in Bermondsey. Supposed suicide of the murderers—name, Nellie Forrester. That can't be it! 'Sudden death of a gentleman from India'—dropped down in the street—'came home in the May Queen,' that was Leah's ship. That's it; she knew him. Did she like him? Oh, Leah, there is a secret attached to you, and I'll find it out! Was he a lover, I wonder!" soliloquised Max Mowbray.

All the while Leah was sitting in her own room like one turned to stone.

"For this I spared him—her murderer."

"There was a quarrel between the mother and daughter, the papers say, and she was heard to come home some time before four o'clock, and at five she was heard to rush away, meeting the landlady's son near the river. In the fog she must have gone straight into the water—there was no escape. She had received a ten-pound note from the man to whom she was engaged, and it was over this they had quarrelled, but the note has not been found."

"I could almost wish it had been," she murmured again, after a pause. "The foul suspicion is frightful—and I am helpless. I could almost wish the note had been traced."

She need not have expressed the wish so readily, for already a sharp look out was being kept by the man who sent it—who never believed Nellie Forrester had committed suicide, but had taken his money and run away from him.

He knew she had never liked him, and he vowed, if she were above ground, to track her to her death—for revenge would be sweet to him.

"Is my sin finding me out already?" she moaned, after a long reflection on her position. "Better—far better to have ended my miserable life in that black river than practice this deceit!"

CHAPTER III.

MAX MOWBRAY had left Devonshire, and life was very quiet and peaceful there—a haven of rest, and yet of unrest to Leah Lorton. Try as she would she could not settle her mind, and not one bit stronger did she appear, though she had now lived there two months; and the spring brought her seemingly no benefit.

Mrs. Lorton had business which called her to London in March, and wrote to her sister, Mrs. Mowbray, saying they would spend their long-promised visit before they returned to Devonshire.

Leah was not pleased with Max Mowbray, she rather feared him from the first moment of their meeting; she remembered how his grey eyes had looked searchingly at her, and now she would be subject to a second ordeal; and it was not in a very amiable frame of mind she first entered his mother's house.

"I am glad to welcome you, my dear," said Mrs. Mowbray, kindly, kissing her on the cheek.

Leah's lip curled slightly. She was supposed to be no longer remembered as the poor governess, but the heiress of Aunt Hester's tiny little property.

"You know my son Max, and these are your cousins, Hetty and Florence, who are delighted as I am to receive you. Your uncle has not returned from the City yet, but he will hasten home, I am sure."

She led the way into the handsome rooms, for the Mowbrays were wealthy people.

"You look pale, my dear," observed Mrs. Mowbray.

"Not so pale as when she came to me—does she, Max? You saw her then?" asked his aunt.

"No; there is a decided change for the better, I should think, in Mrs. Lorton's health," he answered.

Then presently Mr. Mowbray came in, and there was a great deal of general conversation going on, in the midst of which Max drew his aunt aside.

"Aunt Hester, I have had a letter from a friend who knew poor Frank and his wife well. This is part of his letter relating to Leah:—'After some difficulty I succeeded in getting the information you wanted, I am sorry to have to give you such startling news. Leah's father, Mr. Sylvester, suddenly became insane, and was not properly taken care of; he murdered his wife, and afterwards committed suicide; she—Miss Sylvester—went as governess to Major Seton's children until Frank married her. Everyone seemed against the match. As the father's insanity was hereditary, it was thought it might descend to his child; she was a nice looking girl, they say, with dark brown hair and nice eyes, about medium height. After her husband's very sudden death she seemed as if she would go out of her mind, and was always talking of suicide. Many thought she ought to have had someone with her when she came over, but she would insist on going alone to them.' That is all about Leah, my dear aunt."

"What nonsense they talk about brown hair and medium height. Has this friend of yours ever seen Leah, Max?"

"No, aunt."

"Oh! well, I can quite understand the poor child getting no friends there. Her melancholy history, and her beauty, of course, made her plenty of enemies. I suppose she really remembered the dreadful tragedy!"

"Yes, I presume so."

"Poor child! there is nothing insane about Leah; and Max, never mention it to her."

"You may depend on me, aunt."

Meanwhile, Leah was conversing with apparent quiet, but her eyes were really on Max Mowbray.

"You won't object to us having two or three select friends here to-night, dear?" said Mrs. Mowbray.

"Oh! no!" she said, with a sigh. "And I really think I am better in company; it diverts my thoughts."

Hetty and Florence Mowbray were good-looking girls, older than Leah, and yet unmarried, and very nice they looked in their evening dresses, very stylishly made; but Leah, with her simple black silk gauze, with no flowers save a white

rose, in ornaments, made them start with surprise as she came trailing in the room.

"Queen of Night!" murmured a gentleman, as he gave an admiring glance in the direction of the tall, slender, figure.

"I believe she possesses the insanity of the family," muttered Mrs. Mowbray. "She looks almost unearthly," while Mrs. Lorton gazed at her with loving eyes.

Leah, that evening, was the belle; the lovely widow was on every lip—male lips—and each vied with the other in paying her attention.

"Hetty," she said to Miss Mowbray, "who is that young lady there in pink?"

"Oh! Lena Saltrum. Max is fond of her. Got lots of money!"

"Oh! are they engaged, did you say?"

"Will be shortly. She is awfully sweet on Max; and he likes her, I know."

"Max likes her!" repeated Leah, softly, staring in the direction of the couple.

And Max was saying—

"I am not paying her homage as the other men, still I must admire her."

The young lady opened her fan, petulantly, and there was a curl of her lip—a great coldness when she spoke again to Max, which he could scarcely refrain from smiling at.

"I shall lose him," she said, that night, as she returned with her mother. "He is after Leah Lorton, though he professes he does not care for her, and after he has paid me such attention it is too bad."

"My dear, your father must speak to him. Everyone has remarked on his preference for you. I am sure before he went to Devonshire he almost proposed. Lena, if you like him you shall marry him. Max Mowbray won't like to be called dishonourable. Many persons have asked if you were not engaged to him."

And Mrs. Saltrum meant what she said; so much so, that two days afterwards Max Mowbray proposed to Lena, and was, needless to say, joyfully accepted.

Hetty and Florence soon spread the news. That afternoon as they sat chatting with Leah, Hetty said—

"I knew I had something to tell you, Leah; Max proposed to Lena last evening!"

Leah looked startled; all her limbs seemed to tremble, and her pallor caused alarm to her cousins.

"Are you ill, Leah?"

"No, dear!" she said, with an effort; "the least thing startles me. I always expect to hear something dreadful when people appear mysterious."

"Hetty was not mysterious, Leah," observed Florence.

"Was she not?" smiled Leah. "It was my fancy, perhaps. Oh! and your brother is engaged to Miss Saltrum; and she, of course, is very fond of him!"

"Awfully! madly in love with Max ever since she first saw him!"

"And you are very fond of her, are you not?"

"Yes; we are great friends. Only Lena has a temper sometimes."

"I hope they will be very happy."

"So do we. Oh! here comes Max! Well," continued Florence, as her brother came into the room, "we have been talking over your love affairs. Oh! there's mamma calling us. Go, Hetty!"

When Hetty opened the door,—

"She is calling both of us, Max. Mind Leah for a few minutes."

"So my sisters have been entertaining you with my love affairs, Leah?" he asked, as he looked into her pale, lovely face.

"Yes, Mr. Mowbray; and I must congratulate you," she said, twisting her fingers nervously together. "Though I thought your heart was fixed on that other romantic attachment."

"What!" he cried in astonishment; "do you suppose I should look on a girl like that for a wife! Leah, I am too proud a man. If she had been in my own station of life, and if I had been free, I should have adored her."

He looked straight in her eyes, which had sought his with a passionate pleading as if

hoping he would say he loved the girl whom he considered like her.

His sisters now came in.

"Florence, where is Aunt Hester?" asked Leah.

"With mamma, dear."

Under some trifling pretext, she left the brother and sister—but not to seek Aunt Hester—to lock herself in her own room, and fling herself wearily down on her knees, praying that she might be taken from the world, where, even now, all was misery—worse misery than poverty.

CHAPTER IV.

THE astonishment was great that evening when Leah appeared in plain white muslin, black bows, and crimson flowers. If she had looked well in her mourning she surpassed even Hetty and Florence's ideas of loveliness, as she quietly came into the room, and though conscious of many pairs of eyes regarding her, kept to all appearances perfectly unsuspicious of her attractions.

Max Mowbray, like the rest, could not keep his gaze from her, and the first smile she gave him was by her side.

"You are looking your very best this evening," he said.

"You made that remark I remember once before," she answered.

"Did I? Well I suppose I must have thought so at the time. Do you remember generally all I say?"

"Not all; or if I did, Mr. Mowbray, I should remember some rather slighting remarks."

"I never spoke slightly of you," he said, fixing his grey eyes on her face so intently she could hardly bear their power over her.

"If not to myself, you have to others. When I hear myself called the beggar queen, how then?"

His face flushed.

"I never said so, Leah; I was speaking of the girl whom I told you of—the beggar girl."

She nodded as she looked at him.

"She was no beggar," he went on, "but a girl who worked for her living honestly—a good girl, a good daughter."

"And she, I am sure, would have made a good wife," he said, passionately. "And I wish to Heaven I had followed her up! for I see none in my own circle of acquaintances that can vie with her in goodness or sweetness of disposition. There was none of that selfishness I see so much of about her."

"How can you tell?" cried Leah, with her eyes flashing; "how could you tell on so short an acquaintance?"

"Her true blue eyes told me that, at a glance, she was as good as she was beautiful."

"You may be mistaken," she said.

"I am no more mistaken in her goodness than I am in your being my own cousin's wife."

She clasped her hands together and let her head droop on them.

"Leah!" he murmured; "have I offended you?"

For some few seconds she did not speak; then, when she looked up, he saw her face unusually pale.

"You make me angry when you talk so foolishly about your beggar girl."

"Leah, we will never discuss that subject again, we shall never agree. You and Lena are alike in persistently speaking of her as a beggar; and were I free now I would search for her, and would be proud to show her to the world as my wife."

"You have changed your opinion lately," she said, scornfully.

"I have," he answered. "A few unsympathising listeners, Leah, alter a man's opinion quicker than anything else."

"You should not have told Miss Saltrum," she said, angrily.

"If not Miss Saltrum, whom could I speak to so freely? She is my promised wife."

Without another word Leah left him, never

caring what he thought of her; and he sat looking after her.

"Leah, Leah! my queen, my queen! What was the work-girl compared to you! and yet an unfathomable gulf separated us for ever!"

She purposely avoided him the rest of the evening. And when they left for Devonshire, early the following morning, she shook hands calmly with him, but never let her eyes rest on his face one moment.

He saw her wave her hand from the carriage window, and then, as a beautiful dream, she was gone, leaving a gap in Max Mowbray's life, and making him a stern, disappointed man, discontented with himself, and with everyone and everything around him.

Mrs. Lorton and her adopted daughter, as she called her, sped on their way to Devonshire. Leah was excited, and chatted all the way.

It was late when they arrived at the Firs.

"After all, Aunt Hester, this house seems a haven of rest."

"I am delighted to hear you say so, Leah. But we will be gay, my dear. Oh! yes; we'll not shut ourselves up and mope; we'll see some life."

And Mrs. Lorton kept her word, and soon the young widow was well known; and many were the invites she received from various persons. And Max Mowbray heard of the gay parties, and wondered if Leah had a heart, or if that dreadful legacy bequeathed by the father had really fallen on her!

He was very dispirited, and Lena Saltrum's company, instead of being a charm to him, was a trouble. He was anything but an ardent lover, and gradually Lena was growing in her turn colder and colder; so these two, who were to have been man and wife, were drifting apart, and each knew the cause.

Leah had sown the first seeds of discontent in their bosoms; Leah's lovely face was before each; one saw it sorrowfully, the other angrily; and each would have swept it from their lives could they have done so.

"I think," said Max Mowbray to his mother, "I shall run down and see Aunt Hester."

"For what reason?" she asked, sharply.

"Your aunt has Leah now; she is no longer lonely."

"Remember, mother, Aunt Hester's house was always my home when a boy, and I still cling to it."

"Your Aunt Hester has taken a stranger there; she needs you no longer, Max."

"Aunt Hester is always glad to see me, and will think I am neglecting her."

"Perhaps Mrs. Lorton is the attraction now," said Mrs. Mowbray, as she stirred her coffee, glancing at her son as she spoke.

"Why should Mrs. Lorton be the attraction now! Did I not spend several weeks last summer there! Have I not been in the habit of going just when I felt inclined?"

"You were not an engaged man then."

"And I wish to Heaven I was not now," he answered, angrily; "for I am being reminded of it all day long."

"You are a fool if you lose Lena Saltrum," said his father, speaking for the first time, but in a tone which said distinctly how annoyed he felt.

"It is not because I go to Aunt Hester's I am to lose Lena, I suppose! She can have no objection to my visiting there."

"She has a great objection," said his father.

"Where lies the objection?" questioned Max, haughtily.

"In Leah Lorton. Saltrum himself said Lena had complained of your attention to Mrs. Lorton when she was here."

"Then she spoke falsely. No one can accuse me of being more than civil to Leah; and whether Lena objects or not I go to Devonshire, if Aunt Hester will have me."

And Max Mowbray rose from the table in anger, leaving his parents and sisters to carry on the conversation.

While they were discussing his stupidity in giving up Lena and her fortune Max was writing to his aunt, who duly received the letter the next evening.

"My dear Leah, Max is coming here for a little rest, he says, if we will have him; he cannot keep away altogether."

"I am sorry if my being here, Aunt Hester, has prevented Mr. Mowbray from coming to see you."

"No, my love, it is only his nonsense. The latter part of the week he thinks he will be able to come; he does not say what day. He always has come and gone just when he likes. Next to poor Frank I loved Max; and his mother says I have helped to spoil him."

"Does he come down here for quiet, Aunt Hester?" asked Leah, with a little laugh; "because if he does, I am afraid he will be deceived; we have engagements for all next week."

Her heart was in a turmoil. Why should Max come down there! There was nothing said about his marriage with Miss Saltrum; could it be broken off! And though Leah tried her hardest to be forgiving, and forget all the sneers and frowns which had been cast on her, she could not tear the hope from her heart that he might be free, but waited with a feverish anxiety for the days to pass. Friday passed, Saturday morning went by, and Leah, to get rid of time, went to pay a visit. When she returned she saw a tall figure smoking calmly in the soft, lazy summer afternoon, who rose quickly as she came up the garden with a proud step, whose annoyance was as great at her pale immovable face, as hers was at his lazy, indifferent manner.

CHAPTER V.

"I AM pleased to see you, Mr. Mowbray," she said, holding out her hand. "But you look fatigued after your journey."

"Devonshire makes me lazy, Mrs. Lorton. I come down to dear Aunt Hester's whenever I want a nice quiet holiday."

Leah lifted her eyebrows.

"I am afraid you will find the Firs is not the dear quiet home of your time; I have transformed it into a gay country house."

"I did hear you had been very gay, but thought it was only my sister's nonsense."

"I am sorry for your nice, quiet little holiday, Mr. Mowbray, but you know the old adage, 'what can't be cured must be endured.' Good-bye for the present; I'll leave you to enjoy your smoke."

She went into the house seemingly all smiles. What a deceptive life was Leah's! She tried to drown her thoughts in company; and, at last, she dreaded to be alone.

Max Mowbray joined his aunt. Leah was, of course, the theme of their conversation, and Aunt Hester, after praising her, said, quite seriously,—

"I love her for her own sake; she is so anxious always to please me."

"So she ought to be," said Mr. Mowbray.

"There you are, Max; I declare I think you are jealous of her as well as the rest."

He laughed as he stooped to knock the ash from his cigar.

"Ah! here she comes. Leah, my dear, come and give Max some tea; I am sure he is ill-tempered to-day."

"Are you, Mr. Mowbray?" asked Leah, lifting her splendid eyes full to his, with an innocent look which more than ever reminded him of that other face. "Has Miss Saltrum been flirting with someone else?"

"Hang Miss Saltrum! I wish she would," was the gentleman's mental comment, but aloud he said,—

"I don't know that anyone has offended me, yet I feel I could quarrel with a straw."

"Poor man! yours is a sad case," said Leah, laughing. "Try the soothing effects of tea. I don't know that it has such a charm for the male sex as for us women; but nothing like trying. Here, Sir Knight of the Rueful Countenance," she continued, as she handed him the tea. Meeting his look, she blushed, and tried to hide it over the paraphernalia of the tea-table.

"And your sisters are still in town?"

"Yes; I believe the mater and the girls go on

a visit in one of the shires, but I was not sufficiently interested to ask where."

"And do Mrs. Saltrum and her daughter leave town shortly?"

"I believe so," he said indifferently.

"Why did you not bring your sisters with you?" asked Leah.

"I did not wish to be bored," he replied.

"I'm so sorry we have company this evening; but you shall have your dinner to yourself if you are very disappointed. Don't thank me, it is no trouble."

"I was not going to thank you, Mrs. Lorton. I was merely going to ask Aunt Hester if I shall be in the way."

"Of course you will if you look so melancholy as now," laughed Leah; "but you will brighten when you are in company with the Devonshire beauties. We have three coming this evening, and their mother. I do not mean to imply that she is a fourth beauty, but the girls will help while away the time that the loss of Miss Saltrum's company must make tedious; while under the combined influence of the ladies and the four gentlemen, who are to be of the party, you may for a time forget that charming young lady; at least, such is my wish."

"That I should forget her!"

"Not altogether; that is far from my wish, only while you are here, I mean."

"You have told me of the ladies, pray let me know a little more of the gentlemen."

"One is a poor boy of eighteen, or thereabouts, who has taken a great fancy to me and I to him; he is the only son of Mrs. West, and brother of the three charming young ladies before mentioned. Then there is the dear old vicar, whom I am always so fond of talking to, because after a short time he lulls me to sleep; then a Captain Crow, who is coming from Plymouth; and last, Sir Frederick Halton, whom one of the charming young ladies is very smitten with."

"But whom," interposed Aunt Hester, "Sir Frederick cares nothing for when some one else is near," with a smile at the fair face bending over her tea.

Max Mowbray's face clouded.

"Sir Frederick Halton does not bear a good name. There are many rather discreditable reports concerning him."

"I know nothing of evil reports. I only know him from having met him and from his visiting here," said Leah, rather coldly.

With these words she moved away.

Not very long after Max Mowbray was in his room, when he heard voices almost under his window. Surely it was Leah! yes, and by her side was a tall man, whom he easily recognised as Sir Frederick Halton.

For him she had dressed so early for this walk about the gardens! He felt very bitterly against her, and determined he would go back to town and marry Lena Saltrum directly.

He never doubted her objection to this sudden freak; he guessed she would only be too ready.

"Marry him!" he muttered, "and regret it all your life! You would soon find the kind of man you had gained for a husband. As to poor Frank, you never had the smallest portion of affection for him. Bah! it's sickening to hear Aunt Hester speak of this gay life being led to keep you from pining. It's a title, Mrs. Lorton, you want; and if Lord Someone were to come and pay you homage, Sir Frederick might go, for all you cared."

Max Mowbray never came near Leah until she sat at the piano, and then he seemed drawn by some mystical agency. The song she sang thrilled him, and the last words,

"For ever, and for ever,"

appeared sung for him alone. There was no sound for a few minutes—not until Leah had risen—and then poured out thanks profusely, and requests for the song again.

But Leah politely refused to sing again.

"The song always makes me feel sad," she said; "and I can never sing after it so you really must excuse me; and the next time I'll sing plenty for you until you all tell me to leave off."

"I could listen for ever," said Sir Frederick.

"Oh, Sir Frederick! and sometimes you say you do not care for music."

"It is your voice," he whispered, "which has the charm! Come on the terrace."

She looked at Max Mowbray; had he but given her cold thanks; he had never asked her to sing again.

If he had looked kindly she would have refused Sir Frederick's invitation; but as it was he turned his head away. She took the arm proffered to her, and soon he was asking her to be his wife.

"Leah, you must have seen my great admiration for you; you must know you alone have kept me in this dreary old country place. Now give me my answer."

"Sir Frederick, I do not think I shall ever marry again; and, besides, it is too early to receive an offer from anyone yet. My husband has not been dead quite a twelvemonth yet; and I really could not give you an answer until then."

He grasped at the offer.

"You will not receive another offer in the meantime, Leah, if I wait, will you? How long, tell me, is it?"

"He died in September," she said, giving a shiver.

"September! Then the first week I shall expect your reply. And you give me some hope, Leah, don't you?"

"I give you no hope," she answered. "If you like to wait and renew your offer, then I'll answer you. In the meantime we must be as though no word had been spoken."

He snatched a kiss from her lips, which she would have avoided if she could, and then she very soon returned to the house.

The guests departed, and Leah turned to her aunt.

"Aunt Hester, Sir Frederick asked me on the terrace to be his wife."

Max Mowbray never noticed her, but looked out on the bright moonlight.

"And what did you say, dear?"

"That I would give him an answer in a month; and he has agreed to it."

"Aunt Hester," said Max, "I don't think I shall stay after Monday."

"Not go to the picnic, Mr. Mowbray?"

"No, Mrs. Lorton, I think not," he answered, quietly.

"Oh, Max, you had better; I should like you to accept Sir Frederick's invite, and"—she said, in a lower tone—"and look after Leah."

"She will have Sir Frederick to take care of her."

"Yes, I know; but for all that I prefer you being with her. And I don't like him driving her in that dog-cart, he is so very reckless."

"If you really wish me, Aunt Hester, I'll stay to please you, but only for you."

"I never expected you to stay to please any one else, Max," she answered. And then a light began to dawn on the simple old lady that perhaps Max's visit had something to do with Leah being there.

"For he cannot be so fond of his intended wife if he can keep away at a humdrum place like this," she mused.

So Max, making or trying to make himself believe it was to please his aunt, stayed; prepared next morning dutifully to accompany the ladies to church, but his surprise was great when Leah came in in a handsome morning robe.

"Take great care of your aunt, Mr. Mowbray. Do not let your wandering thoughts prevent you from paying her every attention."

"Are you not coming, Leah?" asked Mrs. Lorton.

"No, dear aunt. Sir Frederick promised to bring me over some nice flowers he has in his conservatory; so, as I am nearly an engaged young woman, I must be obedient."

"Then I suppose it is settled," said Mrs. Lorton to her nephew, as they drove away.

"I did not expect he would be the kind of man to be put off with that answer."

And Max Mowbray was wishing he had never come away from town.

CHAPTER VI.

MONDAY morning came; the sun shone brilliantly; and Mrs. Lorton, Leah, and Max Mowbray drove to Sir Frederick Halton's house, about a mile distant. Here were all preparations ready for the picnic. Some of the guests had come; others, whose houses lay in their road, they would pick up. Leah was seated beside Sir Frederick in the dog-cart, while the others of the party came on in waggonettes.

Leah would have enjoyed the lovely drive immensely if her companion had been silent, but he would keep talking all kinds of nonsense until the proposed halting-place was reached. Then he assisted her to alight, when Max thought he held her in his arms longer than was necessary, and she came up inquiring whether he had not enjoyed the beautiful country.

"For I know you are an admirer of all that is beautiful, Mr. Mowbray," she said, archly.

But she could not get him to smile. He had been annoyed since he had seen her and Sir Frederick together, and considered if she were engaged to the baronet she should not seek to hide it from their friends generally.

So the day passed without a word being exchanged between Max Mowbray and Leah Lorton.

But when they were to return Leah would not accompany Sir Frederick in the dog-cart. He tried all his powers of persuasion. It was of no use; she resolutely adhered to her first intention of returning with Mrs. Lorton.

"I am cold," she explained to the baronet. "You will be just as cold in the waggonette," he said, sulkily.

"Have one of the Miss West's," she said, persuasively.

"Hang Miss West!" he answered, angrily, as Leah moved towards one of the waggonettes where her aunt was just seated.

"Mr. Mowbray, there is just room for you," she said, as she passed him.

And who would have thought her voice would have acted like the magic it did! Without one word he took his seat beside her. And Sir Frederick, with a scowl, looked on; but he felt mollified when she called to him as he passed with Miss West by his side,—

"A pleasant drive, Frederick!"

She had called him the first time by his Christian name, and it pleased him, while it astonished the rest of the company, and irritated Max Mowbray extremely.

"Am I to understand you are engaged to Halton?"

"You are to understand no more than you do," she said, smiling in his face. "But behave yourself, and look pleasant. It will be a change to see you smile; you have been unusually glum all the day."

He drew her cloak closer round her slight figure when he saw her shiver, as if with cold; and when Leah shivered again it was only to receive the same attention, to feel the hand of the man she thought more of than life slipped round her waist.

And he, almost beside himself with the magnetism of those love-lit eyes, forgot all, in his entrancement, but the woman at his side, who had so chained his soul!

Then, in Sir Frederick's house, she was equally loving. They sauntered together by the stream until the baronet—who was very jealous of handsome Max Mowbray—found them and took Leah into dinner.

But Max cared not now. When they danced on the lawn to the glorious band, whose bewitching strains lent additional charms to the glorious night, she was enclosed in his arms, and she felt she should have been blessed could she have died there.

"Leah, won't you come along the stream again!" he whispered to her.

She was ready—he could never guess how ready—to accompany him.

"What a glorious evening, Mr. Mowbray!"

"Why do you call me Mr. Mowbray? I call you Leah!"

"Not always, Max," she whispered.

"That sounds better," he said, as he pressed

the hand on his arm. "Leah, you call Halton Frederick. Have you given him his answer?"

"Ah! you are inquisitive," she said, laughing. "Well, just to render his very lonely drive with only poor Miss West pleasant, I called him Frederick."

"It might have been a pleasant drive," said Max.

He did not anticipate much pleasure from it when he proposed for him to drive her home. He said "Hang Miss West!"—just as you might have said "Hang Leah Lorton!"—if Miss Saltrum had made the same proposal.

"I should never have said that, though I have thought many bitter things of Leah Lorton in my own mind, and had resolved to return to town at once."

"To Miss Saltrum!"

"Hang Miss Saltrum!"

"Oh! you are as bad as Frederick!" she said, putting her small hand over his mouth.

But it was only held there captive.

"Max!" she cried, reprovingly.

The hand was loosed, and he caught her in his arms. She was content to be there, with his lips to hers, content to be there for ever; but, looking into her eyes, he quickly recovered composure.

"Leah, forgive me," he cried.

"What have I to forgive!"

"Leah!" came a voice, stern and harsh;

"I have been hunting for you everywhere. Mr. Mowbray, I will take care of Mrs. Lorton; she has promised the next three dances to me."

As the pair moved away, Max Mowbray said,—

"Mad! oh, Leah, Leah! the happiness of my life is gone, and yet I'd risk it if I were free."

And Leah, for the rest of the evening, was not lost sight of by the baronet.

She looked hard at Max as they drove home, and when she said "Good-night!" he looked away from her.

Leah Lorton passed a sleepless night; her soul was wrapped up in Max Mowbray. And he, without a word to anyone but the footman, left by the first train, and, when the ladies came down to breakfast, it was with astonishment they heard of his departure.

To Leah the news fell heavily.

"He has gone to avoid me. After what he said last night he will not stay. Oh! Max, Max! it would, of course, be dishonourable of you to break off your engagement with Lena Saltrum, and to stay near me I know you cannot. My dream has gone! Now it matters not whom I have; I can never marry Max."

That afternoon Mrs. Lorton persuaded her to drive into the town to make some little purchases. She did as her aunt wished, but when she returned, she said,—

"I cannot get the lace, Aunt Hester. I'll go into Plymouth to-morrow. Will you come?"

"Well, I may as well, dear. We'll start early, and be back to luncheon."

The next morning the carriage was ordered, and the ladies were driven into the town of Plymouth.

It was market day, and the town was unusually busy. Leah was driven to the best shop. When she alighted from the carriage two men were in conversation, and made way for her to pass. One belonged to the shop, the other she recognised immediately, and went pale to the lips. However, she commanded herself sufficiently to buy the lace, and then returned to the carriage.

"Home!" she said to the footman, as he closed the door. But she was well aware the man had obtained another look at her face.

And she was right. He had recognised her, and muttered,—

"I always said she was above ground."

Then, turning to his companion, he inquired who the handsome lady was just stepped into the carriage.

"That is a Mrs. Lorton, a widow and niece to the old lady in the carriage. She came from India, where her husband died, to Mrs. Lorton. Let me see, that was some time last February. Handsome woman, isn't she?"

"Very," answered the other man, absently, and, after some few minutes' conversation, they separated.

While Leah, who complained of the heat, lay back in the carriage, and, when the Firs was reached, went to her own room, declaring she could not sit up longer, and for three or four days she was too ill to be seen.

Sir Frederick Halton was very much troubled at Leah's illness, and persistently called to make inquiries.

"I'll see him," she said, one afternoon, to Mrs. Lorton. "Let him come up to my sitting-room."

Her word was law in that house, and Sir Frederick, nothing loth, was soon asking her tenderly the cause of her sudden illness.

"I believe it was a touch of sunstroke," she answered. "It was intensely hot in the carriage."

"It wasn't Mowbray going away, was it?" he asked.

"If it had been I should have gone after him. But you need not be so jealous; no one else wants me."

"Then why not give me my answer?" he asked, eagerly.

"You may have your answer if you like. I'll be your wife!"

Sir Frederick was delighted, and, having obtained permission to come whenever he chose to see her, he left the house, and the very first person he met was made acquainted with the news. It was soon quickly spread that Sir Frederick Halton would marry the beautiful widow, young Mrs. Lorton, and the baronet chuckled over the disappointments of many.

Mrs. Lorton was rather surprised at Leah's choice and her capriciousness, but a loving word or smile soon brought the old lady round. No one was like her beautiful Leah, and she might do all kinds of things and be forgiven, that with another person would be condemned.

One morning, when Leah was walking through the pleasant country lanes, she was accosted by the man whom she had noticed at the draper's shop.

"Nellie Forrester!" he said.

"You are mistaken," she answered, haughtily. "My name is Lorton."

"It is, now; but your name was Nellie Forrester."

"You are out of your mind. Let me pass!" she said.

"No," he cried, planting himself to prevent her passing him. "You must have been insane when you thought to hide from me, when you run off with my note in your pocket. I did not give that to you for a new start; it was to help you until you were my wife. You know me now. I am Fred King, the man whom you promised to marry!"

Leah protested her ignorance, but she found she had her match in this man.

"I shall ferret this out," he said, and he moved away for her to pass. "I'll go to the proper authorities. There will soon be a warrant issued for the apprehension of the murderer of Mrs. Forrester. You can pass now, Mrs. Lorton."

But Mrs. Lorton did not choose to go at his bidding.

"Supposing you found this Nellie Forrester, what would you have of her?"

"To keep her promise," he said, "and to be my wife."

"Would you have a murderer?" she asked.

"I would take her as she is," he answered, ignoring her remark; but if she refuses she can see for herself what is in store for her."

He handed her the copy of an old newspaper, with the account of the murder in it.

"Fred King," she said, "I am engaged to Sir Frederick Halton. How am I to act?"

"Break off with him," he answered quickly; "and tell me first all about that case. The murder, I mean."

"I have nothing to tell you, except I did not have your ten-pound note, and how I came here has nothing to do with you. Suffice it, I am Mrs. Frank Lorton, an adopted daughter of the lady at the Firs, and am very likely to be her heiress."

"Oh! And I shall expect you to renew our old acquaintance."

"Can't you give me a little while, Fred?" she pleaded. "Give me a month, and I promise you in that time to be supposed to make your acquaintance, and also to be your wife as soon as we can arrange all."

"Agreed," he answered; "but mind, I'll keep you under my eye, and Nellie—"

"Leah, if you please."

"Good-bye," he said. "I always gave you the credit of running off with the money."

She gave him her hand and turned wearily away, he watching her until lost to view.

"Better to have ended my miserable existence in that river mud than have lived on in this fear, never to know peace or happiness more!"

CHAPTER VII.

MAX MOWBRAY had parted from Leah because he could not trust himself in her company.

"Even were I free I dare not ask her to be my wife. She has the taint of insanity—I should always be remembering that—and every time she did anything eccentric I should put it down as madness directly. I dare not ask her, even were I free; and now the best thing is to hurry on the marriage as quickly as it is possible. I fancy how pleased Lena will be to see me."

But that day Mrs. Mowbray had received a letter from her sister, telling her Leah was engaged to Sir Frederick Halton, and Mrs. Mowbray had immediately driven to Mrs. Saltrum's to impart the news, thinking it would quiet Lena.

The mother and daughter no sooner felt safe than they intended to make Max suffer for his coldness, and Mrs. Saltrum agreed with her daughter that she should give him his freedom.

"Depend on it, my dear, he'll be so very astonished; he'll make it all up, and ask you to be married directly. Go to the Smiths; they say he means returning to-day. No doubt he will be here this evening if he has come by an early morning train. You can stay the night with them, and I'll talk to the young gentleman."

The young gentleman did call on his way home and very distantly he was received.

"Where is Lena, Mrs. Saltrum?" he asked.

"She has gone to Mrs. Smith's; but I have a few words to say to you. Lena very much objects to the way in which you have treated her; you left for your aunt's without even saying good-bye. We hear you have been carrying on a flirtation with young Mrs. Lorton; and Lena also wishes me to tell you she considers by your behaviour you have rendered the engagement between you at an end."

"Does Lena herself say this?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Did she go purposely to avoid me to-night?"

"Yes."

"If those are Lena's wishes I have no more to say, Mrs. Saltrum. I hope she will meet with some one worthy of her. You have fallen into a slight error regarding my cousin—she is not yet engaged to Sir Frederick; she has postponed her answer for a month."

"That was a shaft directed at me, Mrs. Saltrum," he muttered, as he went downstairs. "It glanced off without damage, but mine told home I fancy; I am free, and yet I dare not. I know she likes me—I could see it in her eyes yesterday, when I looked at her. And yet I dare not—I should feel I was bringing a curse on my head. Her father a murderer, and then to take his own life! and Leah was thought to turn after him. Oh! my queen, my queen! handsomer even than the lovely girl whom fate threw in my path to be a torment for ever!"

For several days Max endured a series of bitter attacks and taunts from his mother and sisters, until at last, goaded almost to desperation, he left once more for his aunt's house.

"I'll ask her to be my wife; and whatever trouble comes of it, it lies at their door."

So that a week had not elapsed when Max Mowbray one evening walked into the house, creating great astonishment. He was glad to find them alone, for, as it happened, the Baronet was dining with some friends.

"Dear me, Max, how you startled me!" cried

his aunt. "Whatever possesses you to race about from one place to the other! You never seem to know your own mind."

"Am I not welcome, Aunt Hester?"

"Always welcome to your home, my dear boy. There sit down and have some dinner. See how you have scared Leah!"

"I am sorry if I have startled you," he said, gently.

"Well, I was rather startled to see you walk in, I must confess; however it is a pleasant surprise."

"It is doubly so to me to hear you say those few words," he whispered in her ear, while his aunt was giving some orders to a servant.

But Leah gave no answering smile, she knew what was in the future for her. She had been thinking what people would say to her preference for Fred King. What would—what could they think of her choice! People already had said she was capricious, they would then indeed have occasion to say so.

Max noticed her still pale face, and now he was again in her society the fascination returned tenfold.

He was glad when he could entice her into the garden; he forgot all his fears, he thought now only of her.

"Leah," he said, "I am free now from my engagement to Lena Saltrum. How about Sir Frederick?"

"I have given him my answer, Max. I have promised to marry him."

It sounded as a knell in Max Mowbray's ears. Lost again! And yet there was just a faint something passing through his mind, other than regret for the loss he had experienced, while Leah hardly seemed capable of thinking at all.

She wandered round the gardens wondering what next would turn against her. She could see that had she waited to give Sir Frederick his answer, Max would have told of his love. But then, that other—what then would she have done!

"Better so!" she murmured, "better as it is! Of all miserable women, was there ever the like of Leah Lorton!"

He looked at her face and saw the pain she was suffering, and his look brought Leah to her senses. She must act her part yet; she must be capricious Leah, or all would be lost. She struggled bravely against all emotion, and the man by her side stared in surprise as she turned to him, asking if he meant to be at her wedding.

"For Frederick says he'll not wait long for me. You think me fickle, don't you; now confess!"

"I cannot understand you, Leah. First you are sad, and then gay. What makes you change so suddenly?"

"I am a restless woman, Max—have all kind of moods, gay and grave."

"And no heart!" he said.

"And no heart!" she answered.

He turned on heel and left her without another word.

"That woman will die in a madhouse!" he murmured to himself. "I'm thankful for being saved from her—dreadful to think of with such beauty, such power to wield a man to whatsoever she wills!"

"Aunt Hester, do you notice anything about Leah's manner peculiar?"

"Very excitable, that is all," answered Mrs. Lorton.

"You don't think that she inherits her father's insanity?"

"Good gracious! Max; Leah is no more insane than I am."

Leah was glad the next day when the baronet put in an appearance, and gladly acquiesced when he asked her to go for a drive with him.

There was a certain air of proprietorship which was very vexatious to Max, and yet he knew, had he been Sir Frederick, he should have been the same.

He roamed about alone, unhappy and ill-tempered. He made Mrs. Lorton angry, until she told him at last unless he could be agreeable he had better return to town.

That evening's post brought him a letter from Lena Saltrum, telling him that she was sorry she had been so jealous of him, and asking him to forgive her.

Mrs. Lorton, after much persuasion, got him to let her read the letter, and then Leah and she talked it over together; and at last, unknown to Max, wrote off an invitation for Lena and her mother for a week if they had no other engagement.

With joy they readily accepted it. And to Max's great surprise one day he saw them at the fire.

He could scarcely believe his eyes when he walked into the room; and Lena fancied he was not over pleased at their—to him—unexpected arrival.

"How is it they are here?" he asked Leah, quietly.

"Why, by Aunt Hester's invitation, to be sure. We planned a nice little meeting for you. Now, Max, my dear boy, make it up with Miss Saltrum, and you will be happy again."

"Did you propose for Lena Saltrum to come here?"

Leah nodded brightly.

"It's not often I make people happy, but this time I hope I shall succeed."

"You will find Lena will not appreciate your kindness, Leah; and as to ever thinking of making her my wife, it is ridiculous! Not after the old lady's withering scorn."

"But you are not to marry the old lady," said Leah.

"I'm not so sure the whole family wouldn't be in the bargain. Lena treated me very badly."

"And you returned the treatment. Yes, Max; you had no right to come here without a word to her."

"She had no right to taunt me as she did," he answered. Then he continued "It's no use talking, Leah, I shall never marry her, no more than I shall you."

Leah shook her head, smiling. But try as hard as she could, tears dimmed her bright eyes; and leaving Max Mowbray looking after her, she went quickly to the house, encountering Lena Saltrum, who had been watching them speaking together, and now saw Leah's face wet with tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I HATE and detest that woman!" said Lena to her mother, stamping her foot. "She has taken him from me. You see, he now pretends he has business in town because we have come here. No, mamma, Max will never marry me, I feel sure."

"My dear Lena, Max will never marry Mrs. Lorton, for her aunt has just been telling me that her father died mad, and Max has a horror of madness, she says. If it had not been known to him he would have made Leah his wife. But he would not have her. So, Lena, if you play your cards well he may renew the old love."

"But not if he is going away!"

"He'll soon get tired. Let us remain here for the week, and by that time he will come to his senses."

"If that is the case, I'll have my revenge on her," said Lena. "Yes, mamma, as I am now sure Max won't have her, she shall not be Lady Halton!"

"Why not try after Sir Frederick yourself, Lena?"

"But I like Max, mamma."

"Nonsense! And so you will Sir Frederick; he is a fine-looking man. Lady Halton sounds better than Mrs. Mowbray."

"So it does; but I like Max."

"Then you are a bigger goose than I took you to be!" said the mother, very impatiently.

"Well, I'll see. Ah! there is Sir Frederick—see, coming in. He is always here—a very different lover to Max."

"I should think so. Now, come down and be as pleasing as you can, and let Max Mowbray see you care nothing for him."

They descended, going into the garden.

"Good-morning, Sir Frederick," the old lady said, sweetly.

"Good-morning," echoed Lena.

Sir Frederick did not seem so much Am-

pressed by their appearance as they would have liked, but he invited them all over to his house.

They set off, Sir Frederick the gayest of the gay.

His sister, a Mrs. Devereux, met them, and Lena now saw a good opportunity of venting her spite. She was all attention to the lady, and the two got on very well together.

They were seated at luncheon, when Mrs. Devereux spoke of that morning, a gentleman admiring their house and asking permission to look over the grounds.

He sent in his card—Mr. Frederick King—and asked if he might look round this afternoon. I gave him permission; but, of course, now we must refuse him."

"Yes," answered her brother.

"But why?" asked Leah. "We need not be in the poor man's way. Perhaps he is an artist."

"Oh! he won't trouble us, I dare say. Yes, let him look round."

They had almost forgotten the circumstance, all but Leah, when the figure of a man was discernible in a portion of the garden.

Sir Frederick, who was always courteous to strangers, went to him, and Leah, knowing he had come there to see her, and would think she avoided him, sauntered over to the baronet.

They were talking to the stranger for a few moments, and then left him to go over the remainder of the grounds.

After a few minutes Leah was not to be seen, and Mrs. Devereux and Lena went in search of her.

"Why, there she is, just by that clump of trees, talking to the stranger!" cried Lena.

"Very improper," said Mrs. Devereux. "It was not quite right to go with Frederick, and speak to him, but—good Heavens! the man is kissing her hand!"

"Come away, Mrs. Devereux," cried Lena; "I will tell you something, only keep it from Leah. She does some very strange things, and we are all afraid she possesses a little of her father's insanity. He murdered his wife and then cut his own throat!"

"Good gracious! And she will be Frederick's wife! Not if I have any power to prevent it."

"Done!" cried Lena to herself, exultingly. "Leah Lorton, I've paid you partly, not all, yet!"

On the following morning the Baronet called quite early, and asked to see the elder Mrs. Lorton alone for a few minutes.

"Mrs. Lorton, I have had a severe blow when I reached home last night. I was telling my sister of Leah being so upset, when she informed me there was insanity in her family. Miss Saltrum had told her. Is this true?"

"Her father died insane. That does not prove Leah is too."

"Pardon me; when a lady allows a stranger to kiss her hands it seems very like insanity."

Then Sir Frederick told of all his sister had seen.

"Under the circumstances, Mrs. Lorton, I cannot fulfil my engagement to Leah. You must know what it costs me to lose her, for she has become dear to me. They say your nephew knows it, and that is why he does not ask her to be his wife."

"My nephew was engaged to Miss Saltrum until they quarrelled over Leah, and then in the meantime Leah had given you your answer, Sir Frederick; but of course I, in her name, release you from any engagement to marry. But you will promise one thing—no word of this shall escape your lips, or it will be her ruin."

"I promise!" he said, solemnly, and Mrs. Lorton knew he would keep his word.

"And leave me to deal with Leah, Sir Frederick. I am very sorry; not that I want to lose her, she is all the world to me, but for you I am sorry."

"It has fallen heavily, Mrs. Lorton, on me; but better now than when she was my wife."

Sir Frederick went home, and by the mid-day train he had left Devonshire, and Mrs. Lorton had seen Mrs. Saltrum and Lena, telling them it was great unkindness on their part, after she had told them as a secret, and to soothe Lena's jealousy; the end being that the ladies also left, and only

Max remained at the Firs, more comfortable now they were gone; and beginning to fall again under the old spell when a telegram from his father compelled him also to start for London.

Mrs. Lorton had broken the news to Leah that Sir Frederick's sister had seen the stranger kiss her hand.

"Was it so, Leah?"

"Yes, aunt! but I thought there was no harm."

"Very imprudent," said the old lady, "you will be more guarded for the future."

"I'll marry the first man who will have me," cried Leah, angrily, "and then I shall be at rest."

"Are you not at rest here, Leah?"

"Oh! Aunt Hester, your goodness to me I don't deserve; bear with me a little longer, dear."

"My love, I have never complained," answered the old lady.

"Say no more, Aunt Hester; if he could so lightly set me aside, he is not worthy of more thought from me."

Leah that day posted a letter herself to Fred King; it was only that she had broken with Sir Frederick Halton, and she was ready to keep her promise with him.

"If I can mould him a little differently it will be to his interest to keep my secret; then I shall be afraid of no one. If any one should turn up here from India, which I am always anxious about, and they say I am not Leah Lorton! I cannot be proved to be anyone else, with Fred on my side to help."

And Fred King, who was delighted with the way events had prospered, went to Plymouth to see about some business, intending to return to his former lodging near Leah, when he was suddenly taken ill.

Leah wondered she had never met him in her rambles, and a fortnight passed away. It made her uneasy. Was he bent on bringing her, as he supposed, to justice?

At last she received a note in a very poor hand. It was from him, but she could scarcely believe it. He said he was very ill, and was not likely ever to recover, and begging her, for her own sake, to come and see him. She determined to risk it, and wrote to say she would come.

Making an excuse to her aunt she took the carriage to Plymouth, and, leaving it at a certain place, closely veiled, made her way to the hotel Fred King was at.

"Are you Miss King?" asked the waiter.

She nodded her head. He called to a woman, who was a nurse, and she led her into the room where he lay.

At a glance Leah saw death in his face.

"Oh! Fred!" she cried, as she clasped his hand, "get well."

"Never, Nellie! I may call you so now!"

"Anything," she said, the tears chasing each other down her cheeks.

"Nellie, there is no help for me now. I must tell you all that is on my mind. I knew when first I came to see you in Bermondsey that there was a Nellie Forrester advertised for in the papers. I made certain inquiries, and found it nearly resembled you who was wanted, and I guessed many would come. Then I wanted you to be my wife, do you see?"

The girl at the bedside nodded.

"The day of the bank-note, I called in the evening and found what had happened. You may guess how completely knocked over I was at the news. You a murderer! I could not believe it, knowing how hard you had worked for your living, and for her."

"I am glad of that Fred!" said the girl.

"And I stayed about the place until the body was taken away; and then, when I was going, I noticed a man there, looking very haggard and emaciated. I took no notice at the time; I only thought he was a looker-on; but I fancied somehow, Nellie, you were not dead. I fancied you had taken the bank-note, and yet I could not believe you had taken your mother's life."

"Well, things went on. Everyone believed you were dead. A body was picked up of a woman round there, and some said it was yours; but I did not share in the general opinion, as I

have said before. But one evening I was sent for to see a man who had fallen in a fit, and was taken to the hospital. It was, you guess whom James Forrester—not your father, Nellie."

The girl's blanched cheeks and wide open eyes told of the struggle within her.

"But your father's worthless brother, who had enticed your poor weak-minded mother to leave her home and her husband. But she took her child—give her all that is due—she could not leave her child. Her parents left her some property when they died to keep her from the union, for they felt dishonoured by the step she had taken. They were holding a respectable position as farmers."

"Your father, after his wife ran off with his brother, went abroad and died there. He left a will, giving all his property to his daughter, Nellie Forrester."

"This is the story, or rather part of it, which James Forrester told me. He thought, when he heard of his brother's death, perhaps your mother could help him; and when, that fatal day you had gone to the City, he had followed you home on the previous night—for he recognised you, though several years had gone by—your mother said you would bring some money home, and she would help him all she could. When you came back she wanted to get you away again to see this worthless fellow, whose mere name she seemed to idolize."

"When you left, after the few words with your mother, he came again; and she had told him of the ten-pound note which I had sent you. He wanted it; but she refused. They quarrelled, and he struck her, she falling dead at his feet."

"This is what he told me when he lay dying in the hospital, and which was taken down in writing. The money which your father had left you went to the next-of-kin, when it became known, or rather was supposed—for no trace of you could be found—you had committed suicide, but you can get it even now! I am ready, if you are quick, to swear to you! Nellie, I'll make all atonement I can."

"Dear Fred, if I had come to you that night, and asked your help, you would have saved me; but when, after my few angry words with my poor mother, I returned, I saw her on the ground dead; and he—my father I supposed him—then crept past me. 'For her sake!' he said, 'you'll not tell. For her sake! for she loved me.' He was my father, I fancied, and could I bring him by my own word to his death? I did not care where I went; but rushed to the river, and here I was saved from self-destruction by what I considered to be Providence."

Then Fred King heard the story of Nellie Forrester's life from then to the present time. She hid nothing from him.

"I destroyed her letter, poor thing; that she wrote, saying her troubles were too great to be borne, telling who she was, and I came in her place. I could tell no one had seen her; her description tallied with mine; but I have had many a struggle to bear, Fred."

"You have a home, Nellie. You love this man, Mowbray. Keep it. There is, that I can see, no harm. Destroy all trace of Nellie Forrester with the stain on your name; and knowing in position you were not his equal he might not care to make you his wife. As it is, worse evils might fall on you. Be Leah Lorton to the end of your days. You are supposed here to be my sister, no one here need be any the wiser."

"Oh, Fred, try and get well, and be my friend."

"Nellie, I would for your sake; but I'm afraid there's no chance now. Go, Nellie, and try and come to me to-morrow. I'm sorry I tormented you; but I would now be a true friend."

"Live, Fred, live, for my sake!"

He shook his head and smiled, then again urging her to leave, for fear of people's suspicions. She said good-bye, left the hotel, sought her carriage, and was driven home.

The next day again saw her in the busy Plymouth town. She passed on to the hotel, and inquired for Mr. King.

"He died late last evening, ma'am," said the

waiter. "His sister returned and was with him. Would you like to see her?"

"No, thank you."

Once more she was at the First, but she hardly knew how she arrived there.

Mrs. Lorton and Leah left some time after these events for Scotland, going very near where the Mowbrays, who had gone for the shooting, were located, and occasional visits were paid to each other.

Max Mowbray was distant and stern to Leah, and she could not understand him. She tried all the power of her witchery on him, and she fancied at times he seemed to forget his chilliness, and be more like the Max of old.

"Leah," said her aunt, "are you ready to go out with me this morning?"

"No, Aunt Hester, I am tired, and it is cold. I think I'll stay indoors. You will not mind!"

"No, my dear," she replied, and soon after Leah was alone, and yet she could not rest.

"I wish now I had gone with her. I think I'll walk round; it is getting very cold now. Ah! we shall soon have winter here."

She put on a warm jacket and went towards Mrs. Mowbray's. They had rented a house for a short time, and people seemed to go in and out as they pleased.

Leah went round by the side gate and walked in—no one was near. She passed into the house, and to the drawing-rooms, which were divided with heavy curtains; here she heard voices. She was intending to startle the ladies when Mrs. Mowbray's words fell on her ears,—

"I do not think, Hester, you should have brought that girl here; she is very dangerous to Max. I tell you I would rather see him dead than married to her. Then followed a long discussion as to Leah's insanity."

The ladies sat at length in silence, and Max came in through the opposite door. Springing across the room he raised the unconscious form of Leah in his arms.

"Aunt Hester," he called. "Mother, come quickly; I am afraid Leah is dead!"

"She has overheard our conversation," cried Mrs. Lorton. "Oh! Leah, my darling, they have killed you."

Leah did not die, though she was very near death's door. She had had fever, which left her very weak and feeble—a mere skeleton.

"We will go home, Aunt Hester, as soon as we can; I shall never wish to come to Scotland again."

She never mentioned one word of that conversation; she only laid on the couch and looked out far away. The doctors shook their heads.

"Some mental distress has caused this!"

"Her mind is sound!" asked Mrs. Lorton, anxiously of the doctor.

"Sound! my dear lady. Sound! I should like to be as sure about my own."

This was balm, indeed; and Mrs. Mowbray and Max were made acquainted with the joyful news.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Mowbray to her son. "I do not know which is the maddest, your Aunt Hester or Leah."

"If the doctors say so, mother," began Max.

"Can they tell! Did not her father's insanity come on suddenly! What do the doctors know!"

It was a fine, sunshiny October morning when Leah left Scotland for her home in Devonshire, breaking the journey in various places, accompanied by her aunt and Max Mowbray, much against his mother's wish.

Leah was unusually thoughtful now, and Max could not bear to see her so quiet.

He would watch her by the hour, feeling such pity for the lovely woman, whom he would have gladly given his life for than know such a curse clung to her.

The First seemed to welcome them with cheerfulness; the servants brightened—for all liked Leah—and were glad once more to have her among them. But how changed she seemed! Not the dashing Mrs. Lorton of old, but a sad, sorrowful

woman, who hid from the world a secret locked in her own breast.

Max stayed on at his aunt's house, meaning to leave every day, but still the same old charms held him captive, and Mrs. Lorton determined for Leah's sake to speak.

"Max, my dear boy, you won't mind your old aunt lecturing you! I see Leah and you are more agreeable together than you have ever been. Now mind, Max, you do not tamper with my poor girl's affections, and then cast her aside. You know marriage with Leah is not to be thought of. You share your mother's horrible opinion; and I would not give my consent, even if Leah would have you; and if she is the woman I take her to be she would spurn your love."

"Aunt Hester, you are harsh. I love Leah dearly, but I will not keep near her. I mean going abroad; it's torture to stay here. I cannot help fancying Leah strange sometimes in her way. I have watched, Aunt Hester, only as a man who loves a woman dearer than life could understand. This horrible legacy of hers has destroyed my happiness!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE firelight was playing on Leah's face as she sat and watched the flickering flame; it touched up the rich colour of her dress; it lighted on the costly lace on her neck and sleeves.

She sat there, richly dressed in purple velvet; why! Max's stay was drawing to a close, and she had something important to tell him.

She was in the library after dinner, and Mrs. Lorton was having her usual little nap. Leah knew Max would search for her, and she had made her mind fully up how she would act.

She sat there dreaming what he would say—how he would scorn her as an impostor—how she would plead to him to forgive her!

She pictured the despair on Aunt Hester's dear old face, and she wrung her hands at the wrong she had done her. And all this time Max watched her by the fire looking wild and almost unearthly in the uncertain light, and a sigh escaped him unawares.

Leah heard it.

"Mr. Mowbray, I want you. Come here, please."

"Why Mr. Mowbray, Leah!"

"You can never be Max to me. Come here, please, I have something to say to you. Do you remember telling me of that girl whom Lena Saltrum styled the beggar queen? Do you know that when she called me by that name, she was not far wrong! When you told me, Max Mowbray, of the girl whom you befriended that day, whom—with all your admiration—you would have been too proud to have stooped to wed—could you have not looked into my eyes and read my secret? Max! Max! I am the girl—the work-girl! My name is Nellie Forrester, and I was accused of the murder of my mother!"

"Leah," said Max, soothingly, "you are excited; come with me to Aunt Hester."

"I will not until you have heard me. You think I am mad, but I am as sane as you, Max Mowbray."

In vain she tried to convince him. He still thought it only a proof of her madness, and so he told Aunt Hester.

She had played her game so well that nothing could be traced, and now she would have altered it; she had outwitted herself. Oh! the horror of it was terrible! To be now supposed a mad woman—not to be able to prove herself Nellie Forrester!

What could she do! who turn to! Alone again in the world, alone—utterly alone—to work for her living. She would go; it would be happier than living in luxury—to be pointed at by everyone.

If she laughed it would be wrong, if she were silent it would be attributed to that one dread cause. And now even Mrs. Lorton believed this; she had rid herself so completely of her old life—of everything connecting her with Nellie Forrester

—there was no way of getting them to understand."

She kept her room throughout the day, and Max Mowbray thought she was perhaps feeling ill. In the evening, however, she came in looking very lovely, dressed again in velvet. In the evening she played snatches of pieces on the piano in a restless kind of way, and then she broke out in the song Max loved. Her sweet voice sounded doubly sweet; there was pathos which only came from a breaking heart, and the last line,

"For ever and for ever,"

fell on Max Mowbray's ears like a knell.

Leah rose from the piano.

"Good-night, Aunt Hester; I am tired. Good-night, dear aunt," she said again, kissing her. "Good-night, Max!"

Both eyes followed her from the room. It was not more than ten o'clock when she left them, and very shortly her aunt followed her, saw she was comfortably settled, and then went to her room.

While Max Mowbray paced the library smoking he was unaware of a figure who just gave one peep, and then sped away towards the nearest inn.

There a fly was waiting, and Leah jumped in.

"You must catch the night express," she said to the driver.

"I'll try, ma'am," thinking it was strange young Mrs. Lorton should be travelling alone, and walking to the inn for the fly.

"Some of her pranks, I guess," he said to a porter as the train sped on its dark journey. Where was she going, except to hide in that big city, to try and obtain employment, to forget she had ever been Leah Lorton or Nellie Forrester; to be someone else!

Both Max and Mrs. Lorton were nearly frantic when they discovered her disappearance. They traced her only as far as Paddington; there she was noticed, but what became of her no one could tell.

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THE ROMANCE OF IVY MOSS.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BALL AT PAPILLON COURT.

WOULD he come, or would he not?

Ivy wondered very much; but mentally could find no conclusive answer to the question.

Nevertheless, she felt something more than a trifle disappointed—something more than a trifle piqued, perhaps, in her woman's vanity—when he wrote to say that he could not come to Huntingtower.

He was very sorry, Keith Falconer said; but he was going abroad again almost immediately. Not on the Continent, as they, Mrs. Falconer and her daughter were; but this time to the East—in all likelihood to Cairo, Jerusalem, Damascus, and such places; possibly on to India and to Australia.

He supposed that he should return some day, he added. But at present he had no settled plans.

"What ails him!" Mrs. Falconer exclaimed in a hurt tone. "He never used to be so restless. I shall write once more, and ask him to strain a point and come to us for Christmas Day, at least. I shall say that we both want to see him."

"Pray do not!" Ivy interposed hastily. "Depend upon it, dearest mother, he cannot come; or—or if he were able, he would do so."

"Well, I fail to understand it!" Mrs. Falconer fretted. "He is only just back from the wildest parts of Western America! I feel so vexed. I suppose now we shall not see anything more of him until—until goodness knows when!"

"Depend upon it," Ivy iterated indifferently—

how hard did she try not to speak bitterly; she wondered whether she succeeded!—"depend upon it, if he could come he would; since he cannot, he will not; he knows his own business best. Mother, I ask you—I ask you as a favour, dear, not to—to write to him upon the subject again."

And so Ivy Dundas and her beloved mother spent a very peaceful and a very happy Christmas together, and alone with each other.

On Christmas Day, kneeling side by side, within the tall carved oak walls of the Huntingtower pew—whence, overhead, the oval marble tablet crowned with the white dove and bordered with the broken lily-wreath, had been removed—how full of unspeakable gratitude to an all-wise, an all-merciful God were their prayers on that Christmas morning!

The New Year came.

Ere the first week of it had passed away, Ivy and Mrs. Falconer had seen their maid pack many a giant trunk, and had crossed the English Channel for an indefinite time—certainly, however, for a whole year.

They were going first of all to visit those foreign towns and cities where Ronald and Ivy as man and wife had lived—where the first strange years of their vagrant married life had been spent together; and in one of which little Derrick had been born.

Nearly two years had come and gone since Mrs. Falconer and Ivy, turning their backs upon tranquil Huntingtower, had crossed the straits of Dover in search of the thorough change of air and of scene which both of them at the time had so truly needed.

Now it was the month of September; and they had been re-established in their fine old Wiltshire home for quite six weeks, perhaps longer.

One hardly comprehends the flight of time when the heart within one is absolutely feather-light and trouble-free, and all the world around one seems glad!

To-night was the 15th of the month; and Papillon Court was splendid with light and company; for there was a great ball to the fore.

It was the first entertainment of any description at which Isobel Falconer had assisted for many a long year gone by; and, in consequence, all her numerous old friends in the county had come flocking to be present at the gathering; to welcome her back to the world, as it were, to welcome back both herself and her daughter at the same time.

At first, however, they had both of them demurred in the matter of attending this ball at Papillon Court—had hesitated, uncertain how to decide, appealing wistfully one to the other. Was it not "too soon," they wondered, to be thinking of routs and balls?

But the Papillons were such old, old friends of the Dundases and the Falconers—they would bear of no denial.

Sir Roderick Dundas's daughter, they said, had been a recluse far too long—she must not shut herself up for ever; and perhaps after all they were right, Isobel Falconer thought, in talking over the affair with her daughter Ivy.

At all events, they gave way in the end; for the festivity in reality was given in their honour; and so on the night of the 15th of September Ivy and her mother went to Papillon Court.

At the time, the Earl and Countess of Exe and her ladyship's mother, Mrs. Featherstone, were staying at Huntingtower; and naturally they were included in Isobel Falconer's party.

Perhaps Mrs. Featherstone herself was at first a little shy amid her grand and unaccustomed surroundings; but Ivy and her mother, and the intrepid Cynthia too, took care amongst them all that she—Mrs. Featherstone—was in no manner abashed by the rest of their friends.

Cynthia had brought her baby to Huntingtower—her second and newest—a small, fleshy, healthy little girl, this one, swathed in flowing robes and costly laces, that was regarded by its delighted parents as something the like of which this world had never seen before.

The little two-year-old boy was staying just now with his grandparents, the Duke and

Duchess of Dartmoor at Dart Castle, in Devonshire.

It was nearing midnight; almost everybody expected at Papillon Court had arrived; the magnificent rooms were already crowded.

For the first dance that Ivy was dancing she was engaged to James Papillon; the next she had bestowed on his brother, young Hughie. These young men, in fact, had appeared at Huntingtower on the foregoing day, and they had then bespoken as many dances as they could worry Ivy into granting them beforehand.

It was with a vague sense of alarm and irritation that Ivy Dundas had discerned that they were in all probability going to be troublesome—these Papillon Court young men; would in fact be somewhat difficult to manage.

Indeed they had, the pair of them, proved more or less troublesome ever since Ivy's return from abroad. James the elder of the two especially; and the young man Hughie was absurdly jealous of his brother.

The dance, a waltz, was over—the music had been enchanting, a Strauss inspiration. James Papillon removed his arm reluctantly from Ivy's waist, as he said boldly,—

"Mrs. Dundas, I don't know whether you are conscious of the fact, but you are looking very lovely to-night."

With a careless hand, but a beating heart, Ivy opened her huge white feather fan.

"Am I?" she returned idly, affecting an ease of manner she was far from feeling. "That is all right then, Mr. Papillon."

"Your gown is so becoming!" he went on, staring down at the beautiful ball-dress, costly in its very simplicity, and at the pure snow-white fragrant bouquet she carried.

"Is it? I am glad you think so. It is quiet enough in all conscience—merely an arrangement in black and white."

"I never saw black and white though, look like that on anyone else," rejoined the young man, with an ardent glance straight into Ivy's cold eyes.

"Did you not? That is singular, Mr. Papillon. Ah!" she exclaimed, with sudden animation, before he could continue, "there, if you will—there yonder is in truth a lovely frock! It is the handsomest I have seen here to-night. But men have no discernment in these things."

James Papillon followed rather cloudily the direction of Ivy's gaze.

"You mean—" he was beginning—

"Lady Exe; yes," Ivy interrupted him smoothly. "Her diamonds—Mr. Papillon, why don't you look at them!—are superb; and just in the right degree suit the gown she is wearing."

"I am sure they do. I will take your word for it, Mrs. Dundas. Suppose we—"

"Do look at the train, Mr. Papillon! That white satin is embroidered with real pearls; and her tiara—"

"A very good get-up of the Countess's, I have no doubt. But give me simple black-and-white," said James Papillon, perversely, "without diamonds."

"Mr. Papillon, I should very much like to cross the room. I want to speak to my mother. Lend me your arm, if you please."

"There is no seat vacant near to Mrs. Falconer," he answered, without stirring. "Far better stay where we are, I think."

Ivy rose impatiently then; and her companion had no choice but to follow her example and obey.

Their progress across the great room was but slow. Under cover of the joyous din around them James Papillon bent his head downward to Ivy's, and he said reproachfully,—

"You dismissed my poor flowers then, I see, Mrs. Dundas?"

"Dismissed them? Not at all. They were exquisite; and indeed they are so still. For they are in a bowl of water, at this present moment, upon my dressing-room table."

"Why, then, if you valued them, wouldn't you wear them?" he asked.

"I would have worn them with real pleasure if I could," Ivy replied gravely, "but I could not. They were brilliantly and tastefully

arranged, Mr. Papillon, but they would have gone ill, you see, with my quiet gown."

"Humph! I suppose those lilies-of-the-valley and white moss roses that you have with you to-night were likewise sent to you, Mrs. Dundas!" This with something disagreeably like a jealous sneer.

Ivy glanced upward at her persistent cavalier, coldly—a little defiantly.

"Yes; they were sent to me also," she replied. And she raised the dear white flowers to her lips, and inhaled their pure fragrance lingeringly as she spoke.

"Sent by someone, I presume," said he confidently, "whom you had previously permitted to learn what colours you intended to wear to-night. Am I not right?"

"No!" Ivy flashed out at this, "it happens that you are completely mistaken. These flowers were sent to me by someone who had the wit to guess that I should wear no colours to-night. Thank you, Mr. Papillon—here is my mother—I need trouble you no further. No, no. I won't keep you. Please do your duty. I have seen your card, remember, and know that you are expected elsewhere."

And so she dismissed him, poor fellow! But this was not the first time by several that Ivy had been driven of late to snub James Papillon.

Well, it was entirely his own fault. There are some men who are so tiresome, so blind, they cannot or they will not see what is plain to all creation save themselves!

With a radiant smile Isobel Falconer turned to her child. Sir Roderick Dundas's daughter was gowned faultlessly in steel grey satin and brocade, that looked like summer moonlight, and that had about it a small fortune in black lace, and she wore the Dundas opals and diamonds.

"Keith has only just arrived, I hear," Mrs. Falconer exclaimed. "If he does not make haste over his dressing, he will find," laughed Ivy's mother, "no partner to be had when he appears by-and-by! As it is, I fear, they have too many men."

"A ball, dear mother, is seldom a failure when there are too many men," said Ivy rather listlessly, avoiding her mother's eyes and staring straight down the beautiful glittering rooms.

"That is a woman's view of the case, naturally," chatted on Isobel Falconer, blithely. "By-the-bye, Ivy, you heard about Keith's telegram, did you not?"

"Yes. He was hindered in some unexpected fashion or other just at the last moment, Hughie Papillon was saying."

"Yes, dear; precisely as he was on the point of starting, it seems," said Ivy's mother. "It must have been very annoying. I think it was close upon eleven o'clock when he did arrive; and then of course he had a five-miles' drive or so from Salisbury. At that time of night there would be no train stopping at Wilton-Magna. And by rights, you know, Ivy, he should have been here for dinner, they tell me!"

"Yes, I know," replied Ivy absently. But in the next instant she roused herself, became alert and ready-witted.

Making his way resolutely towards her and her mother there advanced a certain Captain St. Henry, the son of an Indian officer who had once been a comrade and friend of her father's.

Ivy was engaged to this Captain St. Henry for the next dance; yet, brave soldier and gentleman though he was, she just then wished the young man miles away from the spot. As matters now stood, there were but two clear lines left upon Ivy's card; and it had been desperately hard work to keep even those spaces open until now.

"Mother," she whispered hurriedly, "here comes Captain St. Henry. Make it all right with him for me, will you? I—I do not want to dance again just yet. Ah! and here is Hughie Papillon hurrying up too! The initials of both of them have somehow got put down against this dance—it's a mistake—say whatever you like to them, mother, only—only manage so that neither of them follows me!"

There was a *portiere* immediately behind Mrs. Falconer; and even as Ivy spoke thus in haste to escape, her hand was upon the embroidered cloth.

In another second she had stepped behind the folds of it and was gone; had passed into the hall, and was flying noiselessly towards the morning-room, which to-night was serving as a pleasant lounge.

The morning-room was some distance from the hall-room; and Ivy Dundas now hoped to find the place cool and deserted.

The pedestal lamps shone soft and dim; majestic palms and other tall plants from the conservatories drooped their graceful fronds in shadowy corners.

Ivy wanted a cup of coffee—it would cheer her perhaps; do her good. She decided that she would ring for it, and get it brought quietly to her there.

She entered swiftly, thankful to gain the hush and seclusion of the morning-room. She started; stopped.

For there, in the centre of that morning-room at Papillon Court, stood a man in evening-dress, all alone, drawing on leisurely a pair of gloves.

Ivy could not well retreat; so she went forward.

Keith Falconer looked up and recognised her.

At first, however, she altogether failed to recognise him; for he had grown a short close tawny beard—which, by the way, became him infinitely well; there could be no doubt about that—and he looked older—much older, and graver too than when last she had looked upon his face.

He, like Ivy herself and her mother, had but lately returned from his wanderings abroad; although he, Ivy believed, had been everywhere and seen everything upon the face of the earth; and this was their first meeting since his home-coming to England—and to her.

Yes, thank Heaven, breathed she in her heart, to her, and her only, after all!

She could never remember afterwards what it was they said to each at first—in unexpected moments of intense joy one's wife are apt to take flight. One can be stunned, as it were, by a great happiness as well as by a great sorrow; for both have within them the elements of pain.

But later on she could recollect his saying very gently,—

"My flowers, are they?"

And Ivy answered as gently as he,—

"Keith—whose flowers should they be if not yours? You gave them to me."

He was smiling. His arms were stretched apart.

Straightway went Ivy to his breast and laid her head upon it.

"Beloved," he said, as his arms enfolded her—"my own dear love at last!"

CHAPTER XXX.

"AT LAST AND FOR EVER."

WHEN in Paris together, Ivy's mother was never weary of buying presents for her—presents numerous as they were costly, and often useful. If they had set out upon their travels with many a giant trunk, it was certain that they had returned to Huntingtower with their baggage considerably augmented.

Amongst Isobel Falconer's handsome Paris gifts to her daughter there was a splendid coat of darkest Russian sable, lined luxuriously with quilted primrose satin.

Ivy put on her sable coat—she had worn it that night to Papillon Court—for Keith said that the outer air was chilly; and with her lover she sallied forth into the darkness of the September mid-night.

The revel and its gaiety were at their height; but Ivy Dundas, at least, had forgotten all about it.

True, they heard the music and the laughter; they saw the dazzling lights; but they two with each other were so much alone in creation as if they had the whole world and that sweet witching hour to themselves!

Ah, how happy they were—how perfectly happy! Dear Heaven, could it last, sighed Ivy

in her heart! Was it possible that out of Heaven such happiness could last?

Keith had been explaining to Ivy the nature of the pressing business which had hindered him in town at the last moment, and had made him so late in getting down for the ball at Papillon Court.

And then, in true lover fashion, he went on to tell her that he had loved her always—yes, always—from the very day and hour in which he had first beheld her. Very sweet was all this to the ears of Ivy Dundas, but perhaps, after all, it was scarcely news!

He confessed to her how hard it had been, the keeping and the guarding of his secret; confessed how utterly wretched he had felt when she, with little Derrick, had fled from Stoke Bay; for he had guessed, said Keith, that Ivy would never more return to Mrs. Featherstone's house at Hornsey Rise.

He went on to say that he believed then that he had lost sight of Ivy and her child, perhaps never again to see either of them!

He was aware how utterly alone she was in the world—well knew how cold and cruel is vast London to the friendless and despairing soul; especially to a friendless and despairing woman; and loving her so well and unselfishly, he wanted so watch over her in all straits and disasters, to shield her and the little lad, if possible, from all pain and calamity.

But albeit he guessed, he said, that she had fled back to London, he was of course in complete ignorance as to her hiding place; and so he had been powerless to befriend her in any way.

Yet night and day, confessed Keith Falconer, now, he had thought of her; prayed for the woman he loved; and watched untiringly for a clue which might lead one day to his finding her.

At last, one evening, it appeared, he had had the good fortune to see the Countess of Exe—Miss Hyacinth Featherstone as she was then—but Cynthia had not seen him.

Seated in a hansom, she was driving rapidly in a north-westerly direction, in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park.

A light, as it were, said Keith, had all at once then broken in upon his understanding.

He divined aright Cynthia Featherstone's errand; and hailing another hansom, he had traced her, unsuspected, successfully to Ivy's humble lodgings.

And, after that, he had never been without news of herself and little Derrick. Cynthia was a true friend—staunch and true!

In a passion of love and gratitude Ivy clung to her noble lover—noble-hearted indeed!

"So generous—so unselfish—and—and yet so cold!" she cried a little incoherently. "You knew at last where I and Derrick were living, and yet you yourself, Keith, never came near us!"

He held her fast to his true heart.

"Dearest, I came to you when I was obliged—when it seemed to me that duty and real necessity compelled me to do so," he said simply. "I came when you were lying ill and unconscious, at death's door; I could not come before. How could I!"

"You were living apart from Ronald . . . you were alone . . . was it not right, therefore, hard though indeed it was, that I should hold aloof from you, loving you as I did! Ivy, my sweet, I loved you too well to let even the shadow of a reproach touch you through me."

"The world, my dear one, has no mercy upon a woman placed in life as you then were placed. I tried to do what was—what was best and right, for your sake; both for your sake and the child's, Ivy, my best beloved," he said.

"Nevertheless, sir, you have been cold to me; strangely, inexplicably cold sometimes. You were cold and distant to me when you came to Valley Grange. You have been cold and odd towards me in a similar manner at Huntingtower."

"But I will not humour your vanity, sir, by acknowledging as freely as I might how this coldness and aloofness of yours have at times hurt me. Some day you shall hear—perhaps. Not now," said Ivy softly—"because, Keith, I am so happy—so happy; and disagreeable memories shall in nowise be suffered to cloud the glory of this perfect night—"

Once more he drew her to his heart and held her there; thus stifling all that Ivy would say.

"Ivy," he whispered, "cannot you then understand! A great love is a terrible tyrant—a man's absolute master. Often was I afraid of it myself, knowing it to be my master."

"My darling, if I was ever really cold to you, it was because I dared not be too kind! By the stars in heaven above us, my beloved, that is the stern truth!"

"Cannot you conceive what a hard fight it was for me, Ivy! My love had somehow to be conquered; trampled down; and I wrestled with it daily as valiantly as I was able; daily I strove to live it down! And so I said to myself yearly that it was well and wholesome for me—a great chance for you, my darling—when events brought about the opportunity of your finding a haven of peace at Huntingtower; of your taking shelter from the stress of a world you were sick of, beneath the roof-tree of Ronald's old home."

"Though I never dreamed—how should I!—when I plotted for your coming hither to Mrs. Falconer, I never dreamed, I say, of the extraordinary revelation touching your parentage and your marriage then in store for us all!"

"No, I simply persuaded myself that, could a reconciliation only be brought about between Ronald and old Sir Riderick Dundas, it would, in all human probability, lead to another reconciliation that was greatly to be desired for others as well."

"My darling, you understand me now!" questioned Keith fondly.

"You wished," Ivy murmured back, "you wished to see Ronald and me also reconciled—restored to each other! Yes; I—I knew—I understood that."

"Because," said Keith, "I believed it to be the only possible state of affairs which could ever conduce to the absolute curing of my most terrible madness."

"My great love was in truth a great folly—what good in the circumstances could ever come of it! Alas, Ivy sweet, no good whatever—nothing but evil and dire unrest! Let it be cured, then, slain outright, if it could be done, at any cost!"

"My poor true Keith!" Ivy whispered tenderly, smiling upward in the dim white starshine into his faithful eyes. "My poor true love!"

"Poor, in a sense, indeed, dear heart," he echoed fondly, and yet a trifle sadly. "For, wild and deep and strong as was this great love of mine, it was nevertheless, after all, the passion of a weak and inconsistent coward."

"Ah, no, no, no! Never that, Keith. Never that!" she said.

"Yes; surely that, Ivy, and nothing less. The mere thought of your burying yourself alive in some joyless ascetic sisterhood or other—and that was what you threatened to do, recollect—was a torment unendurable to my mind."

"In that case you would be lost to me utterly! I should be left in the world—you would be gone from it as it were!"

"Never more should I see you; never more hear your dear voice; never more, with my own, should I touch your dear hand. It must not; it should not be!"

"On the contrary, if you went to live with my friend Mrs. Falconer at the Huntingtower, ah! then it would be a very different matter altogether!"

"Sometimes then—even though it were but once in every year—sometimes, in those circumstances, under those conditions, I might see you; sometimes listen to your voice; sometimes feel the rapture of your touch; sometimes realise, just for a sweet brief space, that you and I, dear love, were here upon earth together!"

"And the mere thought of even that poor gleam of happiness, Ivy, was—to me—"

He paused, looked upward, with the wan midnight starshine upon his bare head and face.

He drew a deep, strong, quivering breath which seemed to break from his very soul.

"Yes, Keith!" Ivy breathed, trembling in his arms.

"Was to me as a foretaste of the bliss of Heaven itself!" he answered reverently.



IVY ENTERED THE MORNING-ROOM SWIFTLY, THEN STARTED; STOPPED.

Keith Falconer did at length let her go; and Ivy left him smoking a cigar in the avenue.

She re-entered the house, seeking her mother. The ball-room was nearly deserted; the musicians had temporarily disappeared also; so it was clear that the supper-room and the other rooms must be thronged.

Was Mrs. Falconer, too, in the supper-room, with other guests? Probably. Ivy was hastening thither when she met the Countess of Exe. The Countess's attendant knight of the hour was a stranger to Ivy, however.

Cynthia stopped; the young man with her went on a few paces by himself; then halted likewise—pulling somewhat disconsolately at his handsome moustache, and waiting for Cynthia.

There was something in the face of Ivy-Dundas which made Lady Exe exclaim *sotto voce*, with her brightest and shrewdest smile, whilst her mischievous eyes sparkled like the diamonds in her blond hair.

"Ivy, my dear, tell me what has happened. Come!"

"Nothing—nothing! Cynthia, where is my mother—can you tell me?" questioned Ivy hurriedly.

"Yes. Not many minutes since she went into supper with—I fancy it was General Malcomburst. Now, Ivy, what has happened—will you, in your turn, tell me that?"

Under Cynthia's keen bright laughing eyes, Ivy knew that she was blushing like the veriest school-girl. But, perceiving this, the young Countess had no mercy.

Her whimsical glance made Ivy writha. "Cynthia, Cynthia," she stammered helplessly, wondering secretly whether she looked sublimely happy or ridiculously foolish, "do you remember, long ago, telling my fortune with the cards—just for fun—one evening, when we were alone, at your mother's house in Minerva-crescent?"

"I remember!" laughed the Countess.

"Well, to-night, Cynthia—well, what do you

think!—it—that absurd fortune-telling of yours—has come true! That is all."

"Ah!"

Lady Exe seized Ivy by both her hands; shook them vigorously for some seconds; then imprinted a hearty kiss upon either of Ivy Dundas's burning cheeks.

"Hurrah!" cried the future Duchess of Dartmoor, as she released her friend—a brief characteristic comment, by the way, which seemed in no slight degree to astonish the man who was waiting for her—"Hurrah!"

They live at Huntingtower, Keith Falconer and his wife; and of course Isobel Falconer, Ivy's dear mother, lives with them. The great house, with all belonging to it, is really the property of the late Sir Roderick's daughter, though she always declares that it is not.

It is indeed Isobel Falconer's most earnest wish that her eldest grandson shall, in addition to his own name of Falconer, take the name of Dundas—that is to say, by-and-by, when he shall, Heaven willing, have grown to man's estate.

Since this is the desire of Ivy's mother, the child—when a man—will be known as Ronald Dundas. At present the little lad is called Ronald Falconer.

Sometimes Ivy almost fears that Johnson and Mrs. Whinney between them are spoiling the children. But Isobel Falconer herself, who is as wise as she is loving, says that, so far, one need not fear; it does not matter; for kindness and love are as the very sunshine of little children's lives.

Spill them in their young days, in the right way, says old Sir Roderick's daughter, and it will never hurt them.

Keith Falconer and his wife are staying this year for a few weeks at Valley Grange, with the young Duke and Duchess of Dartmoor, and her Grace's mother, Mrs. Featherstone.

Valley Grange is Cynthia's favourite home. Dart Castle itself, she says, is too large to be

comfortable—it reminds her of the Hôtel Victoria or the Métropole.

How wonderful are the changes which the years bring round! Whether viewed in lightest jest or in grimmest earnest, life is an amazing kaleidoscope!

Last evening Keith and his wife were in Valley churchyard—together they had strolled thither in the dusk of the summer evening. It was all very quiet and holy there as they stood by a little grave.

Stooping, in silence, Keith gathered a spray of tender young ground-ivy from amidst the mossy stones near to the spot, and fastened the dark cool leaves in the bosom of Ivy's gown.

She could hardly tell, at the moment, in what direction his thoughts were drifting.

But he drew her towards him, held her firmly, and looked down seriously into her eyes.

"Ivy," he says, "Ivy, are you satisfied? I often wonder. My dear one, tell me faithfully—has life anything more to give you?"

And she answers him simply and truthfully,—"Nothing, Keith."

"I think of early days, and thee,
And bless thee."

And her arms go softly upward, and rest there about his neck.

He bends his head. His lips are laid upon hers. Their hearts are beating together as one.

He whispers passionately, yet low, and every loving word is distinct in her ears.

"Ivy, my sweet wife—then I, too, am satisfied!"

[THE END.]

HEATLESS light for illumination is a possibility of the near future. Experiments have recently been conducted with the well-known Geissler tubes by which rarefied air or other gas is rendered luminous by an electric current.



"CAN YOU IMAGINE A POSITION MORE DESPERATE?" SAID URSULA, NAGERLY.

MISS GILMOUR'S SECRET.

—101—

CHAPTER XVI.

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.

URSULA breakfasted alone the next morning in a long lofty room, panelled in oak, and lighted by oriel windows, through which the sunlight came, broken into coloured patches by the stained glass that filled the upper parts.

Round the walls were hung family pictures, in some of which she fancied she traced a likeness to Paul Verinder.

Burgess, who waited on her, told her that his master was an early riser, and always went for a walk first thing in the morning—the reason for which Ursula guessed, must be his desire to avoid meeting people.

On this point Burgess was silent. He was a discreet man, attached to his master by the twofold cord of interest and affection, and he never gossiped.

"He asked me to tell you that the house and grounds were at your service for as long as you cared to make use of them," he added, rather reluctantly, for he did not altogether approve of these casual freaks of hospitality on the part of Mr. Verinder. "You need not be afraid of any interference in the grounds. A high wall goes all the way round them, and the Lodge gates are kept shut."

Ursula thanked him and asked for a "Bradshaw." One was brought her, and she found that a train left for London at 4.30, arriving there a few minutes past seven.

This, she decided, would suit her, for it would be already getting dusk when she started, and yet not really late when she got to her destination.

The morning she spent in walking through the grounds, which were not extensive, but prettily laid out in the fashion of half-a-century ago.

She came back earlier than she had intended on account of the white mist that was creeping

steadily upwards from the low meadows down by the river, until it enveloped all the distant prospect in fog, and even hung on the branches of the trees in ragged strips.

In the hall she met Mr. Verinder, who had apparently just come in from the garden, for he still wore a soft felt hat crushed down over his brows, and a Scotch plaid thrown across his shoulders.

In the white morning light he looked older and more haggard than he had done the night before.

"The weather has driven you in, as it has me," he observed, taking off his wraps, "I don't quite know what to make of it. It is early for such a fog as this, and it may turn to rain this afternoon; if it doesn't it will grow denser."

"You ought not to have fogs down here," she answered, "you are a long way from London."

"This is not a London fog, but a river one," he said, smiling slightly. "We are subject to them—because we are rather low, I suppose. Did you rest well, last night?"

His words and manner were quietly courteous, but still instinct with the chill aloofness that seemed to shut him off as completely from human sympathy, as if an actual wall of isolation divided him.

When she informed him of her intention to leave by the 4.30 train, he glanced through the window and shook his head.

"I am not sure that you ought to venture if the fog continues; however, we shall hear later on from Burgess what it is like. He has ridden in to W— to order some things, and will be back in an hour or two. If you still persevere in your intention he shall drive you to the station in time for the 4.30. Now, perhaps, you might like to go to the library, and amuse yourself with the books."

She took this as an intimation that he wished to get back to his studies—which was indeed the case.

If Ursula had been in a less pre-occupied state of mind she would have enjoyed looking at the rare and interesting collection of volumes to

which she was introduced; but now, after turning one or two over rather listlessly she sat down in front of the fire, and remained gazing into its red depths until luncheon time.

This meal Mr. Verinder shared with her; and it seemed as if he made one or two efforts to throw off his habitual taciturnity; his conversation, however, was on purely impersonal subjects—the country, the weather, the spread of education, and music.

Of the latter he announced himself very fond, and after luncheon, Ursula, acting on a sudden impulse, exclaimed,—

"Shall I sing to you?"

He looked rather surprised, and seemed on the point of uttering a hasty negative; but instead of doing so, he said,—

"It would be very kind of you, only unfortunately the piano has not been tuned for many years, so there is no possibility of an accompaniment."

"I can do without one," and sitting down in a low chair near the fire she began to sing "The Harp that once through Tara's halls."

Perhaps her mood and surroundings especially lent themselves to the pathos of the song, and she put more fervour into the words than even she was aware of. Her voice full, rich and vibrative, rose and fell, and echoed through the silent house, which, for twenty years, had been destitute of such sounds.

When she finished Mr. Verinder, without a word of thanks, rose and went to the window, where he remained for some moments looking out on the white wall of mist that confronted him.

"Your voice is a beautiful one," he said, at length, just as the sound of footsteps in the hall heralded the approach of someone. "Here comes Burgess, now we shall hear what he has to say."

What he had to say was by no means reassuring.

The fog had grown denser, and there had been an accident on the railway; not a very bad one,

but sufficient to block the traffic for another six or seven hours. Hence there was no chance of the 4.30 starting though the line would be clear before the night express was due.

"You had better make up your mind to stay until to-morrow," said Mr. Verinder to his guest. "It would not be safe for you to venture to-day; and you are welcome to remain as long as you care to do so."

Almost for the first time he looked fixedly at her.

"You are pale and tired—the rest will do you good."

She felt this to be true. Maybe she had over-estimated her strength, but it is certain that to-day she was even more thoroughly unnerved than she had been yesterday; and, for the first time, a dread of breaking down struck terror to her heart. Suppose, on her journey, her over-strained nerves gave way, what would become of her?

"You cause no trouble, you make no difference to the household," Mr. Verinder went on, seeing her hesitation; "I shall not see you again to-day, probably, for I have some work to finish which will occupy the afternoon and most of the evening. No doubt you find it dull here, but dullness is better than danger."

Finally she consented, and he went off to his study. She noticed that he had not asked her to sing again, and it struck her that her song might have displeased him. But this idea she dismissed; he had certainly looked at her with more interest after the song than before it, and perhaps there was a shade less indifference in his manner.

The hours dragged themselves slowly by, the fog grew thicker and thicker.

In the evening Ursula, sitting alone in the library, began to grow horribly depressed. The intense silence of the house seemed to deepen her loneliness, and once she burst into a flood of miserable tears—a most unusual thing, for she was by no means given to weeping.

Eleven o'clock struck, twelve, and still she sat watching the dying embers of the fire, possessed by a curious disinclination to go upstairs. The thought of the vast room and gaunt bed, with the shadows gathering thickly in the corners, and the ivy tapping against the windows, as it had tapped last night, filled her with a species of superstitious terror.

Some time ago Mrs. Burgess had come in to see if she wanted anything, and had mentioned that she and her husband were on the point of going to bed. Doubtless they had gone an hour ago, but Mr. Verinder was still in his study writing; the study was at the other end of the corridor, so she would have heard him if he had passed the door on his way to the staircase.

Presently it seemed to Ursula that the silence was broken by a soft muffled sound recurring at regular intervals and coming from the direction of the study.

She listened intently, and, finding it continue, went gently into the passage and stood for a few minutes, her head bent forward in an attitude of attention. The sound still went on, but it was so soft that if the house had not been preternaturally quiet it might have passed unnoticed. Moreover, it seemed to come from less distance than the study.

To make sure, Ursula went down the corridor, first of all taking off her shoes so that her movements should be as noiseless as possible, and holding her skirts round her to prevent any rustling.

Outside the study-door she paused; though the knocking still continued, it certainly did not come from within, and she decided it issued from a room between the study and the library, into which she had not had occasion to enter. She wondered whether she had better tell Mr. Verinder, or whether she was only giving way to nervous fears that had no foundation in fact.

Once more she listened, and then her mind was made up, and she noiselessly pushed open the study-door, which luckily for her purposes, swung smoothly back on hinges that had been oiled that very day.

Mr. Verinder's head was bent low over his

manuscript. He looked up in surprise and some slight annoyance as his visitor entered, holding her finger to her lips to enjoin silence.

In a few whispered words she explained the reason of her intrusion; and he, without answering, opened a drawer in the writing-table and took from it a revolver, ready loaded.

The room from which the sound came was a sort of office, used by him for receiving his tenants when they came to pay their rent, or make complaints. In it was a safe where he kept gold and such plate as was not in use in the household; and, from what Ursula told him, he had no doubt that this safe was in process of being broken open.

She could not but admire the coolness that characterised his actions. Bidding her remain in the study, and lock the door on the inner side so as to secure her own safety, he went out in the passage, but was back again almost immediately.

"The door is wedged," he said quietly. "The operator, whoever he may be, has taken sensible precautions against intrusion. I have slipped the bolt on the door, and now I shall have to go outside and tackle him from the garden. This being so, I advise you to hasten to your bedroom."

But Ursula, though she said nothing, had not the smallest intention of following this advice. Her former depression had given way to excitement, she wanted to see the matter out, and when Mr. Verinder let himself through a side door into the garden, she followed gently a few paces behind.

It was easy for her to do this without his suspecting her presence, on account of the density of the fog, which was sufficient to bewilder anyone not well acquainted with the place. It arose in a thick white wall, that seemed to part as you went through it, and completely hid all perspective. The office window was open, as Mr. Verinder had fancied it would be, but the curtains were drawn completely over it, thus shutting out all view of the interior.

Mr. Verinder paused for a moment, and Ursula, brought to a standstill immediately behind him, felt her heart beginning to beat faster. She wondered what he would do. He was not a young man, and it was impossible to say how many people might be engaged within the room. If it came to a struggle, he might fare badly.

No such apprehensions unnerved him. With a swift movement he drew one of the curtains back as far as it would go, and the interior of the office was revealed. It was a small, sparsely furnished apartment, with a safe in the corner at the further end. In front of the safe, which was open, a man was standing, holding in his left hand a lantern, by whose light he was apparently conducting a search. As the noise of the withdrawal of the curtains fell on his ear, he snatched up a small square package—it contained sovereigns—before even looking to see by whom the movement had been made.

"Put that down, and surrender!" cried Mr. Verinder, covering him with his revolver. "If you attempt to move one step, I fire."

The man seemed to hesitate, but not for long. Quite suddenly, he turned round, and stood squarely fronting the window, while the light of the lantern shone on his face—a dark, handsome, disfigured face, whose deep lines were thrown into yet stronger relief by the upward beams of the lantern.

"Fire then!" he exclaimed, with a reckless laugh, that had a ring of mockery in it; "but you'll think twice before you do it!"

The effect of his voice or his face was instantaneous. Mr. Verinder started back, like one who has received a shock; the revolver fell from his hand, with a metallic clang as it touched the flagstones of the pavement; some sort of exclamation escaped his lips.

The intruder was not slow to take advantage of this change of front. He dropped the lantern, thrust the packets of gold in his pocket, vaulted lightly through the open window, and disappeared in the whiteness of the mist, unconscious of the second spectator of this strange scene, who had drawn back with a sort of half-strangled cry when her eyes first fell upon him.

Mr. Verinder's surprise at the identity of the

intruder was hardly less than Ursula's, for in him she had recognised her father.

CHAPTER XVII.

URSULA HAS A VISITOR.

URSULA sat alone in the corner of a second-class compartment, while the train was borne rapidly Londonwards. She had thrown back the heavy veil which, from motives of prudence, she had worn while at W— station, and her face, in the cold grey light of the November afternoon, looked white and anxious. The events of the preceding night had been a great shock to her—as indeed they could hardly fail to be. Mr. Verinder had no suspicion that she had witnessed the scene enacted in the office, and she had thought it wiser to keep him in ignorance. If she had told him she recognised the nocturnal intruder, it would have involved a fuller explanation than she desired to give, besides which it might possibly have furnished a clue that would end in the wretched man's arrest, and though Ursula felt no sort of affection for him, she could not quite ignore the natural tie that bound father and child together.

Thus her one idea had been to get away from the Moat House as quickly as possible, and lose herself in the great wilderness of London.

She had bidden Mr. Verinder "good-bye" in his study where she found him writing as steadily as usual, though his face bore on it traces of recent agitation. He made no attempt to allude to what had happened, and she, impelled by burning anxiety to learn the truth, had asked whether anything was missing out of the safe.

"Yes," he answered briefly, "the thief took away about fifty pounds in gold, and three times that amount in notes."

"Notes!" she repeated, "Have you their numbers?"

"I have, but as I have no intention of trying to recover them that fact does not count for much."

"You will not consult the police then?"

"No. To do so would involve me in a good deal of trouble as well as entail publicity, and I wish to avoid both. Two hundred pounds does not mean very much, I shall not feel the loss of it, so I shall let the matter drop."

"But you will take precautions against the house being broken into in future?"

"Oh, yes. I have already sent to W— for a workman to come and fix electric bells on all the doors and windows, and with these I think I shall be pretty safe."

Nothing more was said, and the two parted, Mr. Verinder preserving his air of gentle coldness to the end. Ursula thought a good deal of him as the train cut its way through the dusk—his grey bearded face, with its deep eyes, and waxen complexion formed a pleasant subject for remembrance than that other mocking one that had flashed across her consciousness so unexpectedly the night before. She shuddered as she recalled it. What would her father do, she wondered; and then, to her great relief, she decided that the probabilities were all in favour of his leaving the country with his ill-gotten gains as soon as he could possibly manage to get away.

At length the train slackened speed, and stopped at Westbourne Park, where the tickets were collected. After that Paddington was soon reached, and its dreary waste of platform and high roof looked drearier and vaster than ever to Ursula as she stepped out. Having no luggage, it was easy enough for her to get away, and take an omnibus as far as Oxford-street. Her destination was Brunswick-square, where lived the "Mrs. Mackeson" with whom she had been staying when chance threw her up against Lady Susan Ferrers.

Number—0 was a flat, dingy-looking house, with a card of "Apartments" stuck up in the faint light. It was too dark and foggy to see much of it, but it appeared to be a typical London lodging-house, of the kind familiar to the West

Central districts, where one naturally expects to see a small and smutty "slavey," with hands and apron equally black, and an apology for a cap, all awry on the top of a touselled fringe, open the door in answer to one's ring.

Instead of this apparition there appeared a short, fat, rosy-cheeked woman, neatly dressed in black, whose very presence seemed somehow suggestive of country air and country freshness. She peered curiously at the tall, black-velled girl on the step then she threw up her hands with a movement of unqualified astonishment.

"Why, Miss Ursula, dearie, is it you! Come in, do, and sit ye down in the warm. It's that raw and miserable to-night, it chills ye to the bone, so you musn't mind coming down to the kitchen—we haven't got a fire nowhere else, except in the lodgers' rooms, and they're all in just now."

She bustled about in front of the girl, leading the way down a dark staircase to an underground kitchen, which, dull enough in the daytime, looked bright and cheerful now under the combined influence of fire and gaslight. The floor was covered with some sort of oilcloth, a home-made rug of strips of red and black cloth lay in front of the stove, affording a comfortable resting-place for a huge black cat, who was blinking his eyes and purring his satisfaction simultaneously under the influence of the warmth. A dresser, laden with crockeryware, occupied one side of the kitchen, a row of tin dish covers, in which the flames brightly reflected themselves, the other, and on the table stood a tray, set with a cup and saucer, while the teapot, covered with a "cosy," stood inside the fender, keeping company with an egg, and some hot, buttered toast.

"I was just going to have my tea," observed Mrs. Mackeson, helping her visitor off with her wraps, and drawing forward a wicker arm-chair comfortably padded with cushions. "It's very late, but I've had no time to sit down for a minute all the afternoon, and what with cooking a chop for one and a steak for another I'm that driv' I hardly know which side I'm uppermost. But I'm glad to see your pretty face once more, dearie, though it don't do much credit to the country air that you've come from. Wait a minute and I'll boil another egg, and then we can sit down and have our tea in peace and quiet, and you can tell me what's brought you here."

The homely, familiar tones, with the burr of a west country accent in them, fell gratefully on Ursula's ears—accustomed as they had been lately to stranger's voices. Moreover, it was very delightful to her to feel, for a time at least, no necessity to keep up a character that did not of right belong to her. Here she could be herself, free and untrammelled; she could say whatever came uppermost without fear of misconception or suspicion. Miserable as was her position, she forgot it for a moment, and breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"It is so nice to be with you again, Lisbeth." Lisbeth, having deposited an egg in the tea-pot—which was her not over-cleanly way of cooking that comestible—took the girl's face between her two hands and kissed it.

"You're right, my childie, but I hope it isn't bad fortune as have druv you here."

"I'm afraid it is, Lisbeth"—her face clouded—"I'm not going back to Lady Susan."

"Then she's discovered about the references!" Lisbeth asked in undisguised anxiety. "Dear me, dear me," she added, rubbing her brow perplexedly with her forefinger, as Ursula nodded assent. "I was afraid it would all come out in time—them sort of things most in generally does. What a pity, what a pity!"

"I hope it won't do any harm to Jane," Ursula said, looking into the other's face.

"You needn't worrit yourself over that. Jane's safely married, and out in Canada, so whatever happens won't affect her."

"And yourself?"

"Oh, I'm all right, I'm not afraid. I've got my house, and I pays my way, for the rest it don't matter much. Now just you have your tea, and forget there's such a thing as trouble in the world. Although I haven't got a spare room

I can make you up a bed on the couch in the first floor front, without anybody being any the wiser. The lady that has it is a sort of invalid, and always goes to bed at nine, and doesn't get up till one o'clock the next day—not that there's really much the matter with her, except idleness. She's bone lazy, and that's the truth."

Mrs. Mackeson had been a servant of Count Lascelles in Vienna, and when Ursula was brought from her convent to take her place as head of the household she had been put more or less in charge of Lisbeth, who was very devoted to her former young mistress, and had proved her affection in many unmistakable ways. Still, she was a poor woman, working hard to make a living and put a few savings by as a provision for old age, and Ursula naturally shrank from being a burden on her.

If she had had any money, she would not have come to Brunswick-square, but beggars can't be choosers, and there was no alternative for her but to stop there until she could find some sort of situation.

The very morning after her arrival she visited two or three agencies, where she put her name down, and paid a small booking fee. She was willing to take any situation she could get—governess, companion, secretary, amanuensis. Unfortunately the supply for these posts seemed to be ridiculously in excess of the demand, and besides this, the disagreeable question of references came in. She had none to give, except Lisbeth, and people in a good position were likely to fight shy of taking her merely on the recommendation of a lodging-house keeper.

The days that followed were wretchedly miserable. Not only was she haunted by remembrances of Westwood, and fears of meeting her father, but the prospect of not being able to find anything to do weighed heavily on her.

"If I don't hear of something this week, I'll go as a parlour-maid!" she said, in desperation, to Lisbeth, about a week after her arrival. "I am tall, and I could soon learn to wait at table and clean silver. Don't you think that would be a good plan?"

Lisbeth smiled with good-humoured scorn at the notion.

"About your learning to wait, and clean silver, I don't think there can be much doubt, dearie, but you're too good-looking for a servant. There isn't many mistresses as would risk having you in their houses."

And indeed Ursula's beauty stood greatly in the way of obtaining a situation—that, and the proud carriage of her fine head, which people fancied pointed to a haughty and imperious temper. Altogether, Ursula's fortunes seemed at their lowest ebb just now.

"Can't we manage the references something like we did before?" suggested Lisbeth tentatively, but the ashamed crimson that dyed the girl's cheek, told her she had made a mistake.

"I would sooner starve!" was the low-voiced reply, and Lisbeth did not pursue the subject.

As much as she could, Ursula helped her in the housework, but Lisbeth would not permit her to do anything that was rough, or likely to soil her hands, and so time hung very heavily.

There were no books in the house, she dared not venture out more than was absolutely necessary for the sake of finding employment, her only resource was plain sewing, and with this she occupied herself assiduously.

Unfortunately it left ample time for thought, and though Ursula was strong, she was not strong enough to put away from her those dreams of "what might have been," which is sorrow's crown of sorrows. Oftentimes her work would drop from her hands, her thimble remain poised in mid air, while her sad eyes, gazing past the area railings to the dingy trees and tall melancholy houses, would see once more the wide-reaching uplands of Westwood, the red sun glinting between the boughs, the avenue of chestnuts under which a man with dark eyes and sunburnt cheeks, rode slowly towards the house, his velvet cap pushed back from his brow, his scarlet coat splashed with mud, the reins hanging loose in his hands.

Thus had Rafe Ferrers often appeared while

she watched him from behind the half-drawn curtains of Lady Sue's sitting-room, and thus he yet more often appeared to her during these weary November days, when her own future looked as dim and hopeless as the murky fog outside.

From these vain visions she was roused one afternoon by a sharp ring at the bell. Lisbeth, she knew, was busy making puddings in the basement, the maid of all work had been sent out on an errand, so putting down her sewing—she was at work in the sitting-room of a lodger who had gone out for the day—she went to the door and opened it.

On the steps stood a small, fair-haired, blue-eyed little lady, exquisitely dressed in violet cloth and costlyables—a lady whose delicate beauty was that of a Dresden china figure, but whose expression was as alert as a robin-redbreast's.

Just beyond the curb was a neat brougham, from out of which she had evidently stepped.

"Mrs. Mackeson lives here!" she said interrogatively, while her sharp gaze took in every detail of Ursula's appearance. "I should like to speak to her."

Ursula stood aside to let her pass, and as the door closed the lady spoke again.

"You, I presume, are Miss Gilmour." Ursula was quite unprepared for this, and though she did not speak the expression of her face was sufficiently eloquent as an answer.

"Ah, I see my idea is correct. That being the case, I think perhaps I had better have an interview with you in the first place, and then, if it prove necessary, I can see Mrs. Mackeson later on. Can you take me where we can have a little undisturbed conversation?"

Startled, bewildered, by the imperiousness of the stranger's manner, Ursula led her to the sitting-room where she had been at work.

The little lady swept a swift glance round, taking in in one coup d'œil, the shabby carpet, the chair and couch covered with faded green rep, the chiffonier which may be characterised as the hall-mark of shabby genteel lodgings, the looking glass over the fireplace ornamented with festoons of cut paper, the Nottingham lace curtains in which part of the November fog had found a permanent resting-place.

Then her eyes came back to the tall slim figure of Ursula, plainly dressed in black, with its coronet of lustrous hair coiled in heavy plaits round the small head, its firm column-like throat, and the delicate hands, long and tapering, which were twisted in each other, and by their movements betrayed a certain amount of nervousness.

"I daresay," said the new-comer deliberately, "you will be able to partly guess the object of my visit when I tell you I am Lady Du Vernet."

CHAPTER XVIII.

URSULA'S CONFESSION.

It almost seemed to Ursula that she had known the identity of her visitor from the beginning. Did not sin always bring its own punishment, and could she hope to escape the penalty of having done evil, even though it had been with the desire that good might come?

Lady Du Vernet, who had watched her closely, saw the change in her face, and after waiting vainly for her to speak, she added,—

"I am here to accuse you of having forged my name; or, at least, of having caused my name to be forged, in August last. I suppose you will not deny the fact?"

"No," Ursula replied, quietly, "I shall not deny it."

Lady Du Vernet seemed surprised at her calmness, which was quite free from any impudent intention to "brazen the matter out." She paused before she spoke again.

"Are you aware that forgery is a very serious offence, and renders you liable to a criminal prosecution?"

"I am quite aware of it, and I am ready to take the consequences of my actions."

Her voice was perfectly steady, her demeanour

firm, but her face had grown deadly pale, and it even seemed to Lady Du Vernet that the nostrils had become pinched and blue. Her ladyship was somewhat of a student of human nature, and she was beginning to grow interested. If this girl were a criminal, she was one of an uncommon type.

"Would it not be better if you were to make a clean breast of the affair?" she asked at length, with some curiosity as to what the answer would be.

"I think not. I am quite ready to confess my guilt, and to yield myself to justice if such be your wish; but I don't think the matter will be mended by talking."

"Then, perhaps, I had better see Mrs. Mackeson at once. Is she in the house?"

Lady Du Vernet was moving towards the bell, but with a quick movement Ursula intercepted her.

"Don't see her if it can be avoided!" she exclaimed, imploringly. "She has done nothing worthy of blame; indeed her motive all through has been one of kindness and friendship towards me. It would be terrible if harm came to her through the sacrifices she has made on my behalf."

Lady Du Vernet's blue eyes opened wider. The matter became more interesting as it developed.

"Mrs. Mackeson is a widow, I understand?"

"Yes. Her husband was killed by an accident the week after they were married."

"And she is the sister of Jane Hollis, who was until recently a parlourmaid in my employ at Patrallan, Worcestershire?"

Ursula's breath came quicker, but she remained silent.

"It was this same Jane Hollis who stole a sheet of my note paper and wrote the letter of recommendation, by means of which you obtained a situation as companion to Lady Susan Ferrers," went on the accusing voice. "It was an ingenious plot and it almost deserved the success that crowned it. Jane Hollis at that time was on the point of leaving my service to be married; and directly after her marriage, she and her husband went out to the Colonies. Still, the arm of the law is long, and it will not be difficult to bring the newly-married couple back to take their trial on a charge of felony."

For the first time Ursula showed unmistakable signs of agitation. She came nearer, and impetuously seized her visitor's hand.

"Be merciful, Lady Du Vernet! Arrest me; imprison me; do what you like with me, only spare those other two who have erred through ignorance and goodness of heart. I will tell you the whole circumstances, and you shall judge for yourself whether they are to blame. Remember that if it is human to sin, it is merciful to forgive!"

Her voice vibrated with intensity of feeling; she did not weep, but her eyes were so full of agonized entreaty that, involuntarily, Lady Du Vernet turned hers away.

Seating herself on the hard rep sofa, she made a motion for Ursula to proceed with her story, and the young girl, after a moment's pause, during which she seemed to try to collect her thoughts, obeyed.

"I will begin at the very beginning—it is necessary in order that you may judge properly the strength of my temptation."

"I was educated at a convent at Lille. I must have been placed there when I was very young, for I have no recollection of a childhood away from the convent."

"The nuns were good to me, and I was happy, although my life was, of course, very monotonous; but I had certain compensations. By temperament I was imaginative, and I was ambitious. These two things prevented my feeling dull."

"I worked hard at my lessons because they would give scope for my ambition; and when I was not working I was weaving all sorts of lovely dreams of the future."

"I knew I had a father living, because he wrote occasionally to the Mother Superior to ask how I was getting on; and, naturally enough, he was the hero of my girlish imaginings."

"It did not strike me that the fact of his never

coming to see me and never writing to me, was heartless and unnatural. I fancied there was a reason for his absence, and the mystery of it helped to deepen the charm."

"When I was eighteen it was arranged I was to leave the convent; and, accordingly, my father wrote to say he would come and fetch me away."

"How eagerly I looked forward to that day, how I counted the hours—the minutes even—and could not sleep for excitement!"

"Well, he came, and although he was handsome and courteous I was conscious of a chill of disappointment. He professed himself pleased with me, ran through the list of my accomplishments, made me play and sing to him, and hoped I was a good conversationalist."

"But there was something in his manner that reminded me of a purchaser valuing some article of merchandise he has bought—it had no spontaneous affection."

"I did not put these thoughts into words at the time, but they haunted me, and gradually took shape later on."

"I bade good-bye to the nuns, and left the convent with my father, who took me to Vienna, where he had a fine house, and an establishment of servants. Amongst these was Lisbeth Mackeson, and she was the only one who was English—perhaps this accounted for the fancy I took to her. Anyhow, she was the only woman I trusted amongst them all."

"My father seemed to entertain a great deal; night after night his salon was thronged with guests; but they were mostly gentlemen who played cards all the evening."

"To cut the matter short, my father kept a gambling-house—a private one it is true—where large sums were won and lost at roulette, baccarat, and other games of chance."

"When I learned this my disillusion was complete, and my pride, which until then had sustained me, was bowed to the very ground. At first I locked myself in my room and refused to appear; but my father was a man unaccustomed to opposition, and he insisted on my obeying his wishes."

"After a while a sort of desperation seized me, and I yielded myself to my fate, since there seemed no escape from it."

"Lisbeth had gone away, and I had lost my only friend, I had no money, and no hope. Night after night he made me appear in the salon, dressed in fine gowns, and adorned with many jewels, and then I learnt for the first time the power of my beauty."

"All the years I had spent studying, all the accomplishments I had learned, all the dreams of being great and famous in the world, counted for nothing—the only things that gave me power were the gifts of nature—a pair of fine eyes, good teeth, rosy lips. I think I grew to despise myself as much as I despised the men who made love to me; their compliments sickened me, their glances of admiration drove me almost frantic."

"My father reproached me for my cold and reserved manners, which he said were calculated to offend people and drive them away from his salon."

"I listened to his reproaches in contemptuous silence, and made no difference in my demeanour. Still I knew that I was a decoy, that the fame of my beauty had spread abroad, and men came on purpose to see me."

"Moreover, I was forced to sing and play for them, and at last a horrible fear seized me that in the end I should grow like my surroundings. I have no wish to dwell on those days, even the remembrance of them is humiliating."

"I had to listen to words of love from men whose wives, perhaps, were waiting at home for them, and instead of telling them how I scorned and loathed them, it was necessary for the sake of my father to keep silence, and accept the flowers that every evening brought me."

"There were a few visitors who were upright and honourable, save for the vice of gambling; these were mostly Englishmen, and my father was careful that I should not make friends of them."

"If I could have gone back to the convent I would have done so willingly, but even though the good nuns had permitted it, my father would

have fetched me away, and his was an authority they dared not resist."

"I even contemplated suicide in my hopeless despair—better that my body should die than that my soul should perish!"

"Just as I was in this terrible condition I had a letter from Lisbeth Mackeson, with whom I had corresponded, and who knew my repulsion for the life my father was leading. A legacy had been left her, and she enclosed enough money to pay my fare to England, offering me at the same time a temporary home in her house, until I could decide on some plan for the future. I accepted her offer, and, as soon as I could, I escaped from Vienna, and came to London."

"Then a fresh difficulty beset me. I knew no one to whom I could apply for reference, and I found people would not engage me without them. I had changed my name in order not to be tracked by my father, who I knew would be furious at my desertion of him, and, save for Lisbeth Mackeson, I had not a single friend in the world. Can you imagine a position more desperate?"

Ursula paused to ask the question eagerly, but Lady Du Vernet, who, her elbow on her hand, was listening attentively to her story, did not reply. She made, however, a slight movement indicative of her desire that Ursula should continue.

"Then Lisbeth suggested a plan to me, by which I might get reference. Her younger sister was parlourmaid at your country house. She was fairly well educated, could write a good letter, and was in a position to procure note paper with your address on it. Why should she not answer any inquiries about me in your name? She was going to leave soon to be married, and the risk of discovery seemed very small. At first I vehemently negatived the plan—it was repugnant to my sense of truth and justice, and I told Lisbeth I would starve rather than adopt it, but as the days went by I seemed to see the matter in a different light. After all, I should be doing no harm to anyone, and, in all probability, the ruse would never be found out—the harm it might do was infinitesimal, while the good was positive and immediate."

"I was still hesitating, when chance threw me up against Lady Sue, and that decided me. Remember my position—remember that I had fled from a life of wicked luxury, in order to preserve my self-respect—that I was willing to work, no matter how hard, in order to support myself honestly—think of my temptation before you judge me. I have done wrong, I know it, and regret it; but I was beset by evils, and I tried to choose the least."

She raised her eyes as she finished, and met her companion's gaze without flinching. Her face was very pale, it was clear she felt her humiliation keenly, and yet there was a certain indomitable pride in her demeanour that supported her even under her self-abasement. Lady Du Vernet thought of Zenobia dragged at the chariot wheels of her Roman conqueror.

"Have you seen or heard from your father since you left Vienna?" she asked.

"Once. I have reason to believe he is in England, and every time I leave this door it is in terror lest I should meet him. I also met one of the men who used to come to his salon—Captain Lequesne—you know him, probably!"

A subtle difference appeared in Lady Du Vernet's expression, but she merely nodded assent.

"He came to dinner at Westwood, and he recognized me, in spite of the fact that I had dyed my hair black. At first he intended telling Lady Sue who I was. He had merely seen me once or twice in Vienna, and he thought—very rightly—that a girl who had been in the habit of frequenting Count Lassalle's gambling salon, was not a proper person to visit at an English country house."

Ursula's tone had grown very bitter; a change came over her face and form. Both seemed to stiffen; then, with a sudden impulsive abandonment, she threw out her hands.

"Madame, put aside prejudice, and judge me! Have I had a fair chance in life—have I not been heavily handicapped from the beginning? I have

tried hard to do right, and when I have done wrong it has been in the hope that good might come of it. Can you blame me very much?"

Lady Du Vernet was a fashionable beauty, a spoiled child of fortune, and a coquette to her finger tips. She had been accused of heartlessness, of frivolity, and she had shown no great symptoms of leniency in her estimate of other people's follies, but it seemed to her that for the first time in her life she was brought face to face with human nature as it really is—human nature stripped bare of the conventionalities that usually clothe it—instinct with elemental passions made up of good and bad, and praying for sympathy through the power of that "one touch of nature which makes the whole world kin."

She was not an impulsive woman, though she was quick enough at arriving at conclusions.

It was fully five minutes before she spoke, Ursula, meanwhile, standing with clasped hands before her, the glow that the emotion of her last appeal had brought to her face, slowly fading as her hopes waned.

"I believe every word you have told me, and I cannot find it in my heart to blame you. That you have done wrong I will not attempt to deny, but whether I should not have done the same, under similar circumstances, I cannot say either. Some people pass through their whole lives without temptation, and to them virtue presents no difficulties, but I doubt whether they will not fare worse when the secrets of all hearts are known, than those others who, having been inclined to yield to temptation, have pulled themselves up on the brink and overcome it."

She was speaking half to herself, now, and in her eyes there gathered a mist of remembrance. It only lasted for a minute, and then she advanced a step, and held out her hand to Ursula.

"My dear," she said kindly, "you have nothing to fear from me. I determined to sift this matter of the forged letter to the bottom, because it is my nature to do so. After receiving a visit from Miss Clementina Ferrers—she, as I dare say you know, was my informant—I went down to Warwickshire, and caused investigations to be made, with the result that my suspicions fixed themselves on Jane Hollis as the person who had written the letter received by Lady Susan. I knew she had married and gone away, but I was aware she had a sister in London, whose address I easily managed to find out. Directly you opened the door to me I knew you must be Miss Gilmour, from the description which had been given me of you. And now we will dismiss the whole matter from our minds. I have denied the authenticity of the letter to Miss Ferrers, but to no one else, and if I am spoken to on the subject, I shall in future refuse to answer any questions that may be put to me. You will follow the same line of conduct."

Ursula bent and kissed the small gloved hand lying in hers.

"I am very grateful," she said simply. "You are very good to me."

Lady Du Vernet laughed lightly.

"Being good is a novelty to me, and perhaps for that reason I like it. I feel inclined to keep up the reputation you are thrusting upon me, by continuing to be 'good to you,' as you call it. And now I will tell you something of my own affairs—a secret that is confined to myself and a great London doctor to whom I yesterday paid a visit. He informs me that my right lung shows symptoms of tuberculosis, and that I must leave England at once, and spend the rest of the winter in a warmer climate—Algiers or Italy. Whether this means that I am in a galloping consumption or not, I can't say, but, anyhow, I intend following his advice by going abroad as quickly as possible. And if you consent I will take you with me."

(To be continued.)

An old law prevails with regard to the pictures in the Louvre, Paris. No painting is permitted to adorn its walls until the artist shall have been dead ten years.

PAYING THE PENALTY.

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CHAPTER V.

It was pitiful for Aunt Marion to note how relieved Rachel was when the picnic, which had been such a wretched farce to her, was over.

Paul Verrel assisted Aunt Marion and Daphne into their carriage, lingering so long at the girl's side to chat, that Aunt Marion caught up the lines and gave old Dandy a cut with her whip, almost running over him ere he could get out of the way.

"Let us drive very slowly, so that they can overtake us," said Daphne, as they turned into the main road.

"They don't want to overtake us," returned Aunt Marion, grimly. "An engaged couple never find time hanging heavily on their hands when they are in each other's company."

Daphne shot her an angry look, and a contemptuous sneer spoiled the beauty of the red lips for an instant.

After riding along in silence for some time she asked suddenly,—

"How did Mr. Verrel happen to fall in love with Rachel so deeply as to ask her to be his wife? They seem so unsuited to each other."

"That is rather an odd question," said Aunt Marion, scornfully. "Why does any man propose marriage to a young girl?"

"Because he has learned to love her, of course, and years for her companionship all the rest of his life."

"It was rather a romantic betrothal, though, after all. They had no courtship like most lovers. Paul had just come from an adjoining city, where he had been admitted to the Bar, and had hung up his shingle to practice law. We had heard about him, but had never seen him."

"All the young girls in the village were talking day and night about him."

"One day, as Rachel was trimming off the rose bush in the front garden, a stranger rode up to the gate and asked for a glass of water. As Rachel was handing it to him, his horse suddenly shied and threw him heavily to the ground. His brains would have been dashed out if Rachel had not sprung forward and caught him just as his head neared the ground, breaking the fall. As it was, his shoulder and ankle were both dislocated. He was brought into the house, and did not leave it for over two months. A fever set in, and if it had not been for Rachel he would have succumbed to it. She nursed him day and night. Even the doctor said he owed his life to her."

"And when he was able to get about he asked her to be his wife out of pure gratitude!" queried Daphne, spitefully.

"Yes, that was the way of it," assented Aunt Marion.

"Ah, if that is the case, my way is clear sailing," thought Daphne, exultantly. "He does not love her; it is only gratitude. I wondered how a handsome fellow like Paul Verrel could fall in love with a dark, plain, lame girl like Rachel Hilton. Bah! it will be easy enough cutting her out with her handsome lover."

At that moment they reached the farmhouse.

"Who is that standing leaning against the gate?" asked Aunt Marion, as Andrew helped them to alight.

"A stranger looking for work on the farm. He's very well dressed, and his hands are white," continued the farmer; "but as he seems so anxious to stop with us, and we need a few extra hands for mowing the hay, I thought I'd take him."

The conversation did not interest Daphne in the least; but quite unconsciously her eyes happened to glance in the direction of the stranger of whom they were speaking.

What was there about the tall, heavy-set figure leaning so carelessly against the gate-post that made her start so violently and drove the colour from her face?

It was only by the greatest effort that she could keep from screaming outright.

"Surely it cannot be possible!" she muttered

hoarsely to herself. "It cannot be he. I must be mad or dreaming!"

He raised the broad straw hat from his head as though to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. She saw his face more clearly.

"Heavens! it is indeed he!" she muttered. "He has followed me, though I thought I had effectually concealed my whereabouts from him. It could not be that he has come here by chance, and does not know I am here. I cannot dare hope it."

Trembling like an aspen-leaf, she hurried into the house and into her own room, declaring to herself that she would stay there until he had left the farm. Then he could not possibly meet her.

She had heard Andrew Lee say that mowing-time would be over in a day or so, and that then he would have to go.

If she could only keep out of his way during that length of time! She must do it at all hazards.

That afternoon, when Rachel returned, she was informed that Daphne was in her room, suffering from a sick headache.

In that instant faded all the bitterness that had been in Rachel's soul against her sister.

She hurried quickly to her room to see what she could do for her; but Daphne was so petulant, so highly nervous, she was glad to come away and leave her to herself.

Three days in a close, stuffy little room in summer!

Daphne chafed at the restraint like some caged lioness, longing to break the bonds which confined her.

Would the detestable mowing never be over, and the stranger sent away from the farmhouse?

She was almost dying for a breath of air.

At last she heard through Rachel that the rush was over, and that the extra hands who had been engaged about the farm were all sent away. She breathed more freely.

"I think I will go out into the garden," she said, throwing open the blinds and letting in the sweet, cool night air.

"Shall I go with you?" asked Rachel.

"No!" said Daphne, throwing a light scarf about her head. "I don't want to be talked to—I want to think."

Rachel looked after her with something like a sigh as she disappeared among the dark shadows of the trees.

"And so that is my sister Daphne," she murmured; "the cold, heartless girl who is trying to take my lover from me, the girl whom I should have loved, but whom, Heaven help me! I find it even hard to respect. Paul was inquiring about her to-night. He seemed so ill at ease because he found she had been confined to her room. Can it be that he is learning to care for her? Ah! how foolish I am; I magnify trifles."

She turned away with a sigh, thinking how Paul had made excuses to leave very early that evening, when he found that Daphne was feeling too indisposed to join them on the porch.

He had not strolled through the orchard or the meadow with her, holding her hand in his, since Daphne had come.

She loved him so well that she could not help but notice the change in him.

She went back to the little sitting-room, and to her basket half filled with stockings to darn, and bent over her task with a little sigh on her lips.

"Why don't you go out and sit on the porch in the moonlight?" asked Aunt Marion, who sat at the opposite side of the table, busily plying her needle. "It's too warm a night for you to work under the lamp-light."

"I shall feel better having some work to do to occupy my mind," said Rachel, quietly; adding,—

"Besides, Daphne did not seem to wish me to go into the orchard with her; she wanted to be alone, I think."

Aunt Marion plied her needle dexterously.

She would not answer, for she knew that it pained Rachel to say anything harsh of her sister. She did not like the stranger but she dared not say so.

Meanwhile, Daphne had walked slowly through the grounds.

A few days within doors had told upon her, and she knew it.

"By this time he is far away," she murmured, half aloud.

"That's the time you were mistaken," said a voice close by her elbow.

A tall form sprung from the shadow of one of the trees and confronted her.

"You tried to evade me," cried the sneering voice, as a man grasped her by her arm; "but you ought to have known me better. I followed you here, though you thought you had given me the slip. Don't make a fuss or scream; you know it will be useless."

Daphne was trembling like an aspen leaf for a moment, but suddenly she grew defiant.

"Well," she cried, "now that you have found me, what do you want of me? I thought we had cried quits long ago."

He laughed ironically.

"It takes two to make that kind of a bargain," he said. "And as to what I want, come and sit down on this bench, and we will talk the matter over." She was trembling with rage, but there was nothing else to do but to comply. "How foolish you were to attempt to escape from me," he repeated, contemptuously. "Your very beauty aided me into tracing you. Everyone takes notice of a handsome young woman. You could not hope to evade me very long."

While he had been talking the girl had been thinking.

Her evil genius had tracked her down, and at the very turning-point of her life he had confronted her.

She had met one whom she could love—one rich, young and handsome—and not this man had come and spoiled it all! She grew furious at the very thought.

"Now that you have found me, what do you want?" she repeated, defiantly.

"That is an amusing question," he answered.

"What do you suppose I want? Why, I intend that you shall keep your promise of marrying me, to be sure."

"And what if I refuse?" she asked hoarsely.

Evidently she did not expect the answer he returned so quickly.

"I would put you in prison!" he cried. "I would let the world know that the young woman posing as Miss Daphne Hilton is a sham—a fraud!"

"Hush!" she cried. "Someone will hear you!"

He did not heed her; he went on, angrily.—

"What a grand exposure there would be if I told the world that Daphne Hilton is dead, and her maid, who happens to resemble her, is trying to usurp her place."

CHAPTER VI.

"Hush! for Heaven's sake, hush!" repeated Daphne. "In Heaven's name will you hush! Do you want to ruin me?"

And she clutched his arm in a terrible grip.

"I want to remind you of where you stand," he replied, grimly. "You seem to have forgotten, and I propose to refresh your memory. I repeat, you were the maid of the dainty heiress, Miss Daphne Hilton, while I was private secretary to her aunt, Mrs. Kesterton, the haughty millionaire old widow."

"When they went abroad they took us with them. While in Switzerland Mrs. Kesterton died, and Miss Hilton was taken dangerously ill with grief over it."

"The doctors, whom we summoned, said that she could not live the night out. It was then that you and I formed the plot which was to bring us a fortune."

"It had often been remarked that you resembled your young mistress in face and form. You were clever, and when I proposed that you should take her place, come back to this country, and take possession of her fortune under the name of Daphne Hilton, you jumped at the opportunity. It was with the understanding that as

soon as you came into possession of the wealth we should be married."

"Everything went along swimmingly. You deceived even the lawyers, who knew Miss Hilton but slightly. Her relatives had not seen Daphne Hilton since early childhood. It was an easy matter to victimise them."

"You proved a clever trickster—you turned everything into cash, and the first thing I knew you had suddenly disappeared, leaving no trace whatever behind you."

"I was good enough for a lover when you were only a lady's-maid, but when you found yourself possessed of a fortune it was quite a different story—you wanted to get a husband with blue blood in his veins. I tracked you down. I had an idea you would come to this place sooner or later, and I came here to watch and bide my time, and here I find you."

While he had been talking she had been thinking desperately. She resolved to resort to a ruse to disarm him of his suspicions.

"I sent you a letter about it just before I left town. Did you not receive it?"

He looked at her incredulously.

"No!" he returned, sharply.

"Then I must have misdirected it," she declared. "I was wondering why you did not reply."

He caught at her answer as a drowning man does at a straw.

"Are you perfectly sure you wrote?" he asked, eyeing her critically.

"There would be no use in saying so unless it was true," she declared.

His demeanour changed toward her at once. He loved the girl so blindly that he was willing to trust her word, even against his better judgment.

"If that is really true, can you forgive me for my suspicions, Boss?" he cried.

"Hush!" she answered. "Never call me that name again. I am Daphne from this time on. Yes, I will forgive you, for, of course, if you didn't get my letter it must have worried you. But you cannot stay here," she added. "Where are you going?"

"To London," he answered. "I will wait there for you until your visit is over. I should like to ask you one more question. Did you know that I was here these three days that you were not visible? Is that why you kept to your room, giving it out that you were ill?"

"Do you think that all the bolts and bars in the world would have kept me in my room had I known you were here?"

He was easily flattered, because he adored the girl.

"Why don't you bring your visit to a close and come away with me now?" he asked.

"Because I want to recuperate in the country a little while," she added. "I am dead tired, and a month or six weeks will build me up."

He looked down at her thoughtfully. He was desperately jealous of her. If she stayed at this farmhouse the eyes of men would not behold her. There was no one here, save the few farm-hands and the old farmer himself.

Suddenly he started. There was that handsome young lawyer in the village. But then he was in love with dark-eyed Rachel. They were soon to be married. He had nothing to fear in that quarter.

Perhaps it would be better for her to stay there for a few weeks.

"Maybe you do need a little rest," he agreed; "so I suppose it is as well for you to remain here."

She was too wise to let him see the smile of satisfaction that played around her lips.

Six weeks! Ah, what might happen in that length of time! She could win Paul Verrel, perhaps, and be far away long ere that time, and Ralph would never dare betray her identity, for she knew a secret concerning him which would send him to prison if she were to reveal it.

He had forged Mrs. Kesterton's name to quite a number of cheques, and had been living luxuriously ever since on the proceeds, so that he was certainly quite as deep in the mire as she was in the mud, as she phrased it in her own mind.

Not! She would defy him when it came to that.

She got rid of him as quickly as possible, and very graciously kissing him good-bye at the end of the lane, with promises of undying affection.

The beautiful, treacherous girl watched him out of sight with a low laugh of derision.

"Now we shall see if the old adage comes true, 'One whom you watch out of sight you never see again,'" she muttered. "Ah, how mad I was! I cared for him at one time. I vowed if I did not get him, that my whole life would be lost. Well, when one gets up in the world one sees life through different spectacles—they are glad enough to give poor companions of other days the go-by."

She turned away, and hurried back to the house. Rachel still sat darning. She glanced up as Daphne—as we shall still continue to call her—entered.

"How much better you look!" exclaimed Rachel, the work falling to her lap as she raised her eyes in admiration to Daphne's face. "The air has brought back the roses to your cheeks, and your eyes are as bright as stars."

"I feel ever so much better," declared Daphne.

The next day, when Paul Verrel drove up to the farm he saw Daphne sitting on the porch, looking as cool and as beautiful as a white rose in her muslin dress and crisp white ribbons.

He flushed as he caught sight of her. Was it only his fancy, or did Daphne blush too? She came forward to greet him.

Rachel was always shy before strangers, but not so Daphne.

"You have come out of your shell like a butterfly," he said, gallantly. "Indeed, if most of us could look like that, it would pay us to have three days of a headache. Do you know what I think?" he said, still holding the little hand in his.

"It would be delightful if we girls could know the thoughts that pass through gentlemen's hearts; it would set much wondering at rest."

He flushed; he understood what she meant to convey by these words. He knew that she wanted him to understand that she would give a great deal to know whether he liked her or not.

"I was going to say," he went on, with a little embarrassed laugh, "you remind me very much of a cousin of mine who used to give out to the family that she had periodical headaches. The truth is she used to shut herself up in her room three days at a time to devour some alluring French novel. It was forbidden fruit to her."

"Perhaps that's why it seemed all the sweeter," returned Daphne, quietly.

Before he could answer, Rachel made her appearance.

She held out her hand to him, but she did not speak a word; only the light in her eyes told how overjoyed she was at seeing him.

He greeted her a little constrainedly before the beautiful Daphne.

"I ran up to see if you would like to take a little drive, Rachel," he said.

She looked at him in a puzzled way.

"I would like to," she said; "but Aunt Marion has gone down to the village, and I cannot leave."

"Why, yes; so you did tell me she was going," he said, with a blush. "I had quite forgotten it."

"Why don't you ask him if he will take me?" whispered Daphne to Rachel, but loud enough for him to hear it.

Knowing that he must have heard it, Rachel could not help turning round and saying to her lover,—

"I—I think my sister would like to go."

"Certainly," said Paul, with a low bow. "Consider me entirely at the service of both your young ladies, and believe me that your will is my pleasure."

"It's awfully kind of you to take me," said Daphne, with one of those smiles which few men could resist. "I'll get my hat directly."

She reappeared before Rachel and Paul had time to exchange a word with each other, stepped into the carriage, and waved an adieu to Rachel as they drove off together.

"I shall be engaged to him before we return,"

she told herself, triumphantly, "despite all the Rachel's world holds; and if I can get him to marry me before we come back, perhaps I shall never return. I am sure I have no particular wish to see that poky little farm-house, and that patient, reprehensible-eyed lame girl again."

Still waving an adieu back to Rachel the carriage was lost to sight at a bend in the road.

Was it fate that Rachel watched them out of sight, her eyes filled with bitter tears which she could not repress?

"I wish he had not been so willing to take her!" sobbed the girl. "I could not have gone with any one else but him. I—I do not think Daphne fancies him, for she knows that he is my lover."

CHAPTER VII.

DAPHNE was in high spirits as the carriage bowled rapidly over the country road. She had the consciousness of looking her best, and she saw admiration in Paul's eyes.

She knew that he could not help being charmed with her, and it was for this reason that she robbed herself so carefully in her prettiest dress. Nothing could have been more becoming to her than the broad white Leghorn hat trimmed with white tulle and nodding blue violets, which were just the colour of her eyes. She knew he was contrasting her with plain, unpretentious Rachel, who certainly lost by the contrast.

"Have you any particular place you would like to drive to?" asked Paul.

"Yes," she said, trying to speak unconcernedly; "there is a little church down in the valley that I think is quite pretty. I have never been quite near to it. It looks wonderfully picturesque."

"It is a little unsafe to drive there this season of the year," said Paul, doubtfully. "The freshets have swollen the creek so high that it threatens to carry away the bridge at any moment. We should be in a terrible predicament if we happened to be on the other side of it and anything occurred."

"The danger surrounding it makes it all the more desirable to see," laughed Daphne. "Do let us go by all means."

"I am willing if you are not afraid to risk it," he answered, turning his horse's head in that direction.

They crossed the creek, driving rapidly up the opposite side, and arrived a few moments later at the church.

"Dear me, what a beautiful spot!" said Daphne. "Where does the clergyman live?"

"In the little cottage in the rear," he answered. "You can see it through the trees if you look sharp."

"Will they let us go inside the church?" she asked.

"The door is never locked," he answered, pushing it open.

"How timid one feels in a place like this!" she whispered, catching hold of his hand.

What was there in the contact of these little warm, clinging fingers that sent such a thrill through his heart?

And the eyes that looked into his seemed to burn their way into his very soul and to hold him spellbound.

"Shall we sit down and rest awhile?" asked Daphne, in that wonderfully low, mesmeric voice of hers.

"I don't mind," said Paul; "in fact, I should rather prefer it. I feel unusually tired."

They sat down on a seat at the foot of the altar, the setting sun shining in through the stained-glass windows, throwing long, slanting shadows across the floor of the dim old church.

"I should be afraid but for your presence," whispered Daphne, adding: "How strange it is the perfect trust we feel when those whom we care for are with us. Oh, Mr. Verrel, what have I said! Can you ever forget it? I never meant to utter the words; but somehow they sprang from my lips before I was aware of it."

Her sobe were so wild that he was quite sure that she would attract attention from the pastor's cottage in the rear.

"Do not be so frightened, Daphne," he said. "You haven't said anything out of the way."

He was only human. It was only natural that he should be pleased and flattered with the startling confession that had come so thoughtlessly from this girl's lips—that she had fallen in love with him.

"Do not cry so, Daphne," he said, taking the girl's hands and drawing her near to him.

"Oh, what must you think of me!" sobbed Daphne.

"Think!" he repeated, "that you are the sweetest girl in the whole wide world, and that he who wins you ought to be greatly envied."

"I do not think that we can help letting our hearts go out to one whom we recognise as our ideal, whom fate causes us to meet, no matter what obstacles there are in the way, do you?" she faltered.

"You are quite right, Daphne," he said, huskily. "It is beyond our power to say whom we shall love and whom we shall not."

In that moment the beauty of the girl maddened him.

The witching of her presence seemed to pervade all his senses.

He forgot Rachel, home, friends—ay, all the world in that moment—forgot everything but the maddening presence of the beautiful girl by his side, who confessed she cared for him, and who was weeping her heart out because she had told her secret.

"Forget what I have said, Mr. Verrel," she whispered. "I am going far away, and you will never see me again."

"No—no, Daphne!" he cried. "Do not go away. I should be so miserable without you—now."

"Why would you be miserable without me?" she questioned.

"Because I—I love you!" he whispered, desperately, flinging prudence to the winds. "Since I have known you the world has changed for me."

"Do you really mean it?" cried Daphne.

"Yes," he answered, recklessly.

"But is it true you are betrothed to another?"

whispered Daphne.

His handsome face grew white and haggard.

"Yes," he answered, as though the word cost him the greatest effort of his life. "I plighted my troth before I had ever seen you. Do not despise me for it, Daphne, rather pity me. I might have had a peaceful enough life of it with her had you not crossed my path and taught me the sweetness of love. If I were to lose you life would never be the same again. I shall go to Rachel and tell her the truth, and ask her to release me, then you and I will be married. We need not remain here, we can live elsewhere."

"That will be capital!" cried Daphne, clapping her hands gleefully.

Even though he was so madly in love with the beautiful girl it struck him that it would have looked less heartless on her part to have expressed some sorrow for Rachel; but he was too much in love to allow his mind to think upon that subject more than for the passing instant.

After a moment's pause he said, hesitatingly,—
"It will go hard with Rachel, I think! but better to part with her before marriage, when I find I do not love her, than to have made the discovery when it was too late!"

"Then you and I are engaged now?" asked Daphne, eagerly.

"I—I can hardly expect you to concede that just now," he answered, hastily. "You know the old lines,—

"It is well to be merry and wise,
It is just to be honest and true;
And to always be off with the old love,
Before you are on with the new!"

Daphne lit her lip with vexation. She would not lose him thus easily. She must make him feel that an engagement existed—that she had a hold upon him, ere they left the church.

"I do not agree with you that one should break off with the old love," she declared.

He looked at her as though scarce comprehending her meaning.

"What would you wish me to do?" he asked, wonderingly.

"We could pledge ourselves to each other here and now," she declared.

"Would you really want me to do so under the circumstances?"

"Yes," she decided.

He was so infatuated with her that if she had commanded him to hold his hand in a flame he would have done so.

He drew off a sparkling diamond ring which he wore, and placed it on the engagement finger of the little white hand.

"To consummate our love by our betrothal," he whispered. "I have only one request to make, Daphne," he added. "I do not want you to wear it just yet, on account of Rachel. It will take me a week or two to sum up courage to break off with her. It would break her heart if I were to tell her suddenly, you know."

"A week or two!" cried Daphne, impatiently. "Why, that is a lifetime almost to keep from wearing a beautiful ring like this! I wonder that you could possibly think of waiting that long. Why, any other man but yourself would make short work of the matter."

"How!" he asked, in puzzled wonder.

"Why, we could elope, and that would be so romantic!" cried Daphne.

"Then the shock would indeed break Rachel's heart," he answered, gravely.

"He is worrying a good deal about Rachel," thought Daphne, her sweet smile giving him no inkling of her inward rage.

She thought that she had but to hint at the elopement to have him seize eagerly at the idea. She did not dare urge the matter, lest she should appear too anxious; for she was shrewd enough to realize that no man wants a girl who throws herself at his head.

If he said two weeks she would have to let it go at that, though she promised herself she would be married to him and away ere that. What did she care for the breaking of Rachel's heart, as he called it?

CHAPTER VIII.

"COME," he said, laying his hand nervously on her arm, "it is going to storm. I shall barely have time to get you home ere we have a regular down-pour. See how dark it is getting; those are rain-clouds over there."

"Oh, I am afraid to go!" cried Daphne, clinging to his arm.

"You need not be," he answered, flinging his arms about her.

At that moment the vestry door opened, and before Paul could unclasp his arms, he saw the clergyman standing in the vestry door staring at him in amazement—looking at Paul and the young lady in unfeigned astonishment.

Paul was the more confused of the two.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Fraser, stepping forward; "is not this Mr. Paul Verrel, the betrothed lover of Miss Rachel Hilton?"

The young man flushed a burning red, then turned deathly pale.

"I was at one time," he answered; "but my betrothal to Miss Rachel Hilton is now broken off. It is to this young lady I am now engaged."

The grieved expression on the clergyman's face was gall and wormwood to Paul.

"Ah!" exclaimed the clergyman, "I was not aware of it. I beg your pardon."

Paul still saw that he was not quite satisfied with the explanation. A sudden thought came to Daphne—a brilliant stroke to seize a fortune and a husband at one and the same time.

"He does not believe it; he will never believe it until he sees us married!" she sobbed. "And oh, I am disgraced for ever, and all because I let you put your arms around me just for that moment! Oh, the fatal mistake!"

"Daphne," he cried, "have no fear! Harm shall never come to you through any act of mine. I will marry as soon as I can obtain a license."

"You have saved me!" cried Daphne, throwing her arms about his neck as impulsively as a child might have done. "Oh, Paul, you must indeed love me! I accept your offer."

The clergyman started back. This second demonstration of this rather bold young lady almost took his breath away.

"Good sir," said Paul, with a face still very white and troubled, turning to the clergyman, who could not hear their whispered words, "we have concluded to have the marriage ceremony performed here to-morrow or the next day, if you are willing."

"That is really what we came here to see about," chimed in Daphne, suavely.

"In that case I have nothing more to say," said the clergyman, gravely enough. "If it is your wish that I shall unite you in marriage I will do so."

It had all been so sudden, Paul bowed assent. He had not dreamed that Daphne would consent to anything so hasty when he made the proposition; but when she said "yes" so readily, for an instant it nearly took his breath away. But would stand by what he had said, no matter what stood in the way.

As they were standing there making arrangements the old clergyman fell suddenly to the floor.

"A case of apoplexy," said Paul, springing to his side.

Daphne fairly gnashed her teeth in suppressed rage. She had been so near the consummation of her hopes; but she dare not say a word under the circumstances.

The clergyman's wife was hastily summoned, and he was cared for at once.

"We happened to be passing, and called in to look at the old church," said Paul, giving Daphne a warning look. "We were very fortunate in timing our call so opportunely."

"Why didn't you say you came here to see about getting married?" whispered Daphne.

"Because I do not want anyone to know it until it is an accomplished fact," said Paul, quickly. "There might be some one to interfere with it."

"Who could possibly interfere with it?" asked Daphne, wonderingly.

"My uncle, for instance, might not sanction it," he replied.

She had heard that Paul was expecting to inherit his uncle's fortune.

She was very much in love with handsome Paul, but she had little use for a poor man. That would make all the difference in the world to her.

"I leave it all to you, Paul," she said, choking down her discontent. "Of course you know best. I will be guided entirely by your wishes."

He breathed free.

"There is nothing for us to do but to go as soon as possible," he said, after they had rendered the clergyman's wife all the assistance in their power.

It was hard for Daphne to hide her chagrin as they rode homeward again.

"Will not the clergyman tell your uncle when he recovers that we were about to be married?" she asked doubtfully.

"I do not think he will ever open his lips to tell anything in this world," he replied. "I am sure his case will prove a fatal one."

Aunt Marion was on the porch anxiously awaiting them when they drove up.

"How long you have stayed," she said. "I was afraid you had met with some accident. Rachel was frightened too."

Paul felt wretchedly guilty.

He could not bring himself to say that he had been to the old church with Daphne.

"We went round by the old turnpike," he said. "The roads were much better."

"It was a great deal out of your way," said Aunt Marion, suspiciously.

To this Paul made no reply, as he followed Daphne into the house.

They met Rachel in the hall-way. She had heard the sound of wheels, and was limping hurriedly out to the porch.

"Oh, how glad I am to have you both home again!" said the girl, happy tears of relief shining in her dark eyes. "I grew so restless as time wore on that I hardly knew what to do with myself. I wandered from the door to the window and back again a score or more of times.

But come in and get your supper, you must be very hungry."

Ah! how guilty Paul felt as he looked down into the sweet calm face of the girl whose heart he was soon to break.

The storm which Paul had predicted was coming down in great force now; they had barely escaped it.

Daphne was glad to be under cover, for her curls were beginning to straighten. She realised full well that she would look a sorry sight without them, and she was wise enough not to appear before a man she liked without looking her best.

She fell back upon her old plea—the headache.

"I think I will go to my room," she said, "and rest awhile. My head is beginning to ache!"

To Paul her action had an entirely different meaning. He believed she intended him to take advantage of her absence and break with Rachel, and he said to himself that perhaps it would be the wisest course.

How sweet and home-like she looked sitting opposite him in her plain brown dress and stiffly starched snow-white apron. The damp weather, of which Daphne was so frightened, did not detract from Rachel's beauty; the damper the day the more the dark rings of clustering love-locks curled around the girl's white forehead in soft baby rings.

"Tell me all about your ride, whether you had a good time, and where you went."

He repeated the same story to her that he had told Aunt Marion on the porch.

"It was so good of you to take Daphne out to ride, Paul," she said, gently; and the words smote the guilty lover's heart like the thrust of a sharp sword.

After the meal was over and the supper-dishes cleared away Rachel spread the red table-cloth, lighted the lamp, with its crimson shade, and sat down opposite him at the table for a quiet talk.

Aunt Marion was in the next room bustling busily about. She always managed to give the young folks a chance to talk to each other without seeming to do so.

"I am glad of this opportunity for a quiet little tête-à-tête," said Paul, "I have seen so little of you of late, Rachel."

"And I am glad to have you here to talk to," she answered, with a blush and a smile. "I was afraid you might have taken a notion to cross the creek, Paul," she said, "and it is so very dangerous, you know, at this season of the year."

"Supposing anything did happen to me," he said, with an uneasy little laugh.

"I would not like to suppose anything of the kind," she said, "for if anything did happen it would kill me."

He started. How could he find words to tell what was in his heart, she trusted him so!

"I think there is a guardian angel watching over you, Paul, to keep you from all ill," she went on, quietly. "When I saw the storm coming up I knelt down and prayed to Heaven that no harm would befall you."

How could he tell her? He would let it go until another time, he said to himself, desperately. She was so sweet, so gentle, that he could not help but think himself the most arrant of cowards as he bade her good-night.

She watched him until his carriage was lost to sight over the hills. The rain ceased, the shadows were lifting, and here and there a star struggled bravely through the clouds.

"How strange Paul seemed to-night," she thought, "as if there was something on his mind. But then he is getting to be a great lawyer, with law cases on his mind. It is those which make him so serious at times."

CHAPTER IX.

PAUL VERREL had had the opportunity of telling Rachel all, but he had not the courage to do it when the time came.

"I will tell her the next time, or, perhaps, it would be better to put it all in a letter, or better still, it may be wisest not to mention the matter now while Uncle Roger is so ill, he thinks so

much of Rachel. When he is strong enough to be about I will break it to him gently."

As he neared his home he saw old Mr. Walton, a friend of his uncle, running lightly down the steps.

Paul had studied law under the famous old lawyer, and he made haste up the steps to shake hands with him.

"It was very good of you to take an hour out of so busy a life as yours to make a call upon Uncle Roger," said Paul, gratefully. "I am quite sure he must have been pleased to see you, as he has asked repeatedly for you of late."

The old lawyer smiled, and wondered if Paul knew why his uncle was so anxious to see him, and wondering, too, what he would think if he knew that the object of his visit was to draw up a will for Roger Verrel, in which he had left every shilling of his vast fortune to sweet Rachel Hilton, the beautiful lame girl to whom his nephew was betrothed.

Roger Verrel had often talked the matter over with him before, and he had often heard him remark that it wasn't the wisest thing in the world to leave a young man a fortune. If he were betrothed to a sensible young woman, the proper thing to do was to leave her the fortune, then it would be invested wisely, and he was not surprised when Roger Verrel asked him to draw up a will in accordance with his desires.

The old lawyer knew shy, pretty Rachel, and he was very glad when he heard of her engagement to handsome Paul Verrel, and equally pleased, though he said nothing, when he was called upon to draw up the will leaving everything to Rachel.

He hid the sly twinkle in his eye and greeted Paul gravely.

After a few moments' conversation they parted and Paul walked into the house.

His uncle was sitting in his invalid chair by the window, looking very white and wan, Paul thought.

"How is Rachel?" he asked, as Paul flung himself into a seat opposite him.

"She's well," said Paul, carelessly. "But why are you up, uncle? This isn't one of the days that you were to leave your bed, you know."

"I thought perhaps you had gone to take Rachel for a drive, when I heard the carriage leave the yard, and I wanted to be at the window when you two rode by, for a glimpse of her sweet face is like sunshine."

"What would uncle say," thought Paul, uneasily, "if he only knew the truth? There would be a scene, and no mistake. I could not convince him how sweet and lovely Daphne is, nor how much I am in love with her. He was the one who insisted on my asking Rachel to marry me, when he heard that she had saved my life. I said at the time: 'If I should ever meet some one whom I should care more for, uncle, what then?' 'You never will, you could not, Paul,' he answered me. It was not my fault that what I feared would happen has come to pass. I could not give up Daphne, I have learned to love her so."

All that night he dreamed of Daphne, and how soon they would have been wedded, but for the unfortunate accident that had happened to the clergyman.

"There may be a little scene when uncle is first informed of it, but it will end in his forgiving us when he sees Daphne, and liking her quite as well as he does her sister Rachel," said Paul.

Early the next day, as soon as he could wind up his practice, he drove off to Willow Farm.

There was a fête to be held at the church in the village, and he had made arrangements to take Rachel some time ago—that was before Daphne came—but of course he must take Daphne too. Yet how could he manage it?

"I shall trust to fate to show me some way out of the difficulty," he murmured, as he jumped into his phaeton.

Daphne was watching for him in the porch. Rachel was busy helping her Aunt Marion with the housework.

It was a day that every one in the village and for miles round had been looking forward to for many a week.

A number of young girls from the adjoining farms had gathered at Mrs. Lee's house.

Paul found quite a group of them when he arrived. Daphne held aloof from the county maidens in supreme disdain, while they all looked upon the town beauty with great awe.

They had all heard of Rachel's twin sister. Rachel had talked about her ceaselessly. She was far lovelier than their fancy had painted; still she was so proud that none of them liked her.

Two farm waggons, drawn by four horses each, were pressed into the service; three boards were placed across each wagon, to do duty as seats, and each wagon was to hold as many jolly country girls as could get into it.

Daphne, dainty and smiling, realized that it would be a tie between her and Rachel as to which of them should ride beside Paul in his carriage.

(To be continued.)

THE GOOD MAN.

—101—

Not the good man thus denominated by courtesy, as in the old Scottish song,—

"There's nae luck about the house,
There's nae luck at a';
There's nae luck about the house,
When our gude man's awa'."

The man of the house thus referred to may sometimes be a very bad man, indeed, in reality.

But the good man to whom we refer is a far different individual. He is more often seen than heard of, and it is easier to tell what he is not than what he is.

He seldom achieves renown as a great general, statesman, or hero of any kind. He is not the "shining mark" that death is said to love for his aim; he may, like Moses, live to be ripe and full of years, ere he is gathered to his fathers.

The good man may be moderately rich, but he is very apt to be rather more than moderately poor. But whether rich or poor, he is not parsimonious. He gives freely of that which he has, though it be nothing more than the typical cup of cold water.

He casts his bread upon the waters, though not with the hope that it may return to him after many days.

He divides his last crust with those more needy or unfortunate than himself, and when he has no longer a crust to divide he gives what is better—a sympathising ear, and some comfort and consolation as he is able to bestow.

But with all his virtues the good man is not by any means immaculate. He has his faults; and, unlike Goldsmith's charming vicar, his failings do not always "lean to virtue's side."

He is sometimes unable to pay his debts; and he has been known to use words beginning with d—, when he pinches his fingers in the barn-door, or when the brindle cow unfeelingly plants her hoof on his tenderest corn.

But it is only under strong provocation that our good man uses such language; and then he repents in "sack-cloth and ashes" after it, and shakes his head sadly over his own shortcomings, as he smokes his pipe on the back porch.

But his nature is not a morbid one, and with the mental resolution to do better hereafter, the good man soon finds relief from the twinges of a remorseful conscience under the soothing influence of "tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep."

The good man never backbites his neighbours; not because he has laid down a rule to that effect, but because in the kindness of his heart "he thinketh no evil." He does not discover the beam in his neighbour's eye, for the mote of which he is conscious in his own.

Though simple-minded he is not ignorant, nor foolish, nor wanting in sensibility. Like charity, he "suffereth long, and is kind." He can rebuke one who insults him, and he can also forgive one who injures him, though he does not forget the injury.

And if he heaps coals of fire on his enemy's head he does it so judiciously that, instead of

scorching, they melt the enemy's iron heart, and turn him into a faithful friend.

The good man does not "temper justice with mercy"; he adorns mercy with justice, and though he may not be aware of it himself, the "golden rule" is the lodestar by which he steers his barque through the voyage of life. It is the compass which he consults in all the shoals and narrows of his voyage, and guided by it he never goes astray.

The good man is tender-hearted, and would no sooner hurt his neighbour's feelings than he would steal his money.

He is as honest as the day is long—not because "honesty is the best policy," but because it is right. He is never indolent, or negligent, but attends strictly to the performance of even the simplest duty, but it is his duty, and therefore must not be neglected. And what he does is sure to be done well, for the good man does not believe in half-way jobs of any kind.

If he is well off he does not tie up his money in the bank and live like a hermit on the interest of it, thus virtually burying his talent in a napkin.

He engages in some business, and keeps his money in circulation, thereby doing a vast amount of good to his fellow beings. He does not practice unnecessary economy in the matter of dress, of help, or other expenditures.

He considers parsimony a worse fault than extravagance; for, whereas the parsimonious man does no good to anyone with his money, the liberal man assists others to live, even though he may grow poorer himself.

The good man is never harsh in his opinions of others, for he judges everyone by himself. His doctrine is a very simple one—to do no harm, but all the good he can, to every living creature, and for the rest to trust in that Divine Providence "Who doeth all things well."

In a word, we all know, or have known, the good man and the good woman, too, who is his counterpart, and sometimes goes ahead of him, both in his virtues and his failings.

And we know that we ourselves, as well as the world at large, are the better for their existence.

HER BITTER SORROW.

—102—

(Continued from page 201.)

They hunted for Nellie Forrester; they scoured the neighbourhood of Bermondsey, but she was too well hidden. With the money she had, and which, she said, in her letter to Mrs. Lorton, she would return when able, she had taken a poor lodging in Camden Town. She was well aware that the old quarter would not be safe for her, and, plainly dressed, she had passed as Miss Smith.

She told her landlady she was a governess out of a situation; that her friends were all in the North, and she was seeking for pupils round the neighbourhood.

She obtained, by the landlady's help, some pupils at the house, and also went out to teach; but it was a very hard struggle, and as well she at last turned to the old needlework.

"I can do a little while I am teaching, and when I am alone," she said. And only after many journeys to the City—not the places where she would be at all recognised—she procured some work, and so dragged on the lonely, cold winter.

She generally wore a thick veil, but she did not like to when fetching her work, and managed as well as she could for that to be in the dusk.

Hard work and hard living was telling terribly on her.

"She's in a galloping consumption," said the woman to her husband when speaking of her.

"Do you think she is a lady?" he asked. "Shouldn't be a bit surprised; got friends hunting after her, perhaps."

They were right, Max Mowbray was searching everywhere, but not with that old pain at his heart.

Already a burden had been lifted; once more he had heard from his friend that Major Seton was in England. He hunted him up, and in-

quired all about his cousin Frank's widow. The description given did not tally with Leah.

Max drew out a photograph.

"Is that anything like her?" he asked, hanging as if for life on the Major's words.

"No. That is a handsome woman, but certainly not poor Leah Sylvester. I have a carte of her which you shall see."

He sent for it, and it at once showed the dissimilarity.

After a few words of thanks he walked lightly along until he reached his mother's house, then to Aunt Hester with the news.

"Please Heaven, we will find her, Max! She shall be the same to us."

"Not the same to me, aunt," he said. And his aunt understood him. "She shall be Leah Lorton until she is Leah Mowbray—as far as the outside world are concerned. No one else need know her history."

But the Christmas passed, bringing no tidings. The new year came and Max almost despaired, when suddenly one day the lovely work-girl passed him.

He could only see her in her shabby hat and dress as the work-girl whom Lena Saltrum had called the "beggar-queen," and yet there was Leah's face in its pensive mood!

He watched her in the shop, and waited over an hour until they were closing. Then he went in and made inquiries.

"That was Miss Smith, one of our out-door workers," was the reply. "She left by the side door."

"Can you give me her address?"

"Not now; I don't know it. And the forewoman is gone—can give it you to-morrow morning if you like."

So Max had to be content and wait. He was early the next morning, but could gain no tidings. The forewoman distinctly refused to give the address.

"Miss Smith does not wish to be known. She is not like the general class of needlewomen."

"But I am related."

"I am sorry, sir; but I passed my word to her I would keep it secret."

Max left the shop when the porter came out.

"Leave me your address, sir, and I'll try and find out and bring it you this evening."

A substantial gratuity, and the promise of repeating it, made the porter very anxious to be as good as his word, and in the evening Max received the rather far-off message of one of the streets leading off College-street.

It was very vague, but he acted upon it. His search almost proved fruitless, but at last he met a workman, and asked him if he knew of a Miss Smith living down the street they were then in.

"Why, my wife's got a Miss Smith, a lodger. Teaches music and does some needlework."

"That's the lady!" cried Max.

"I'm not sure, sir."

"Let me see her at once!"

"I couldn't do that, sir, because it might not be her; for there is another Miss Smith does needlework living at the end house, and if my Miss Smith wasn't your Miss Smith she might not like me answering questions and leave, and then my missus would make a fine fuss."

"How can I see her?" asked Max.

The man looked up at the heavens, and down on the ground.

"I've hit it, sir. My brother lives right opposite me; you go in his parlour window and I will get her under some pretext or other to go to the door."

Max was ready to comply with the man's request, and the people having been duly informed of the little plot, Max took up his position and succeeded admirably. It was Leah!

A short time afterwards there was a knock at the door of the Robinsons, and Max was admitted.

Miss Smith had sat down to her work. The door opened; she had her back to it. Thinking it was the landlady she never looked round, but went on with her stitching until a manly form fell at her feet, and Max Mowbray was asking her to forgive him.

"Forgive me, Leah, my dearest!"

"I am not Leah. Oh, Mr. Mowbray, why have you hunted me down? I am Nellie Forrester, indeed I am!"

"You are Leah Lorton to me. I banish my sweet work-girl—my beggar-queen—for ever, but Leah Lorton returns with me to her aunt. See here," he said, producing the photographs, "here are two Leah Lortons; this one, poor thing, perished miserably by her own act; this one lives to make the man who loves her happy for the rest of his life."

"Do you really mean that you will be party to the fraud?"

"I mean you return to your own place as Leah Lorton. Whoever likes to think differently can; you must always be Leah to me. Come, my dearest! Aunt Hester waits to welcome you. Come, truant, no one will be the wiser."

"But I am usurping some other person's name and place."

"You are taking your own place, and the name I choose to christen you."

"Will not everyone suppose me to be insane?"

"We'll live that down Leah; that will die a natural death."

Mrs. Robinson was sorry to lose her, though they were not forgotten for their kindness, nor any who had been good to the late Miss Smith.

The joy of Mrs. Lorton on her appearance can be better imagined than described; and Mrs. Mowbray felt greatly aggrieved at Leah's strange behaviour.

"Running away from her aunt for months looks very bad. I cannot understand it!"

And neither could she when, one month later, she had the news that her son Max had married Leah.

She was greatly annoyed, and so was Lena Saltrum; for Sir Frederick Halton was as far off ever.

"They were married in London, my dear," said Mrs. Mowbray to Lena; "and altogether, everything seems surrounded with mystery. When I cautioned him about marrying Leah Lorton because of inheriting her father's insanity, he said 'I'm not marrying that Leah Lorton.'"

"I'll search the register," cried Lena. And so she did, and came back with the startling news that Max had married Nellie Forrester, daughter of George and Nellie Forrester.

Who Nellie Forrester was was a great puzzle, and so remained; she was always Leah, and always lived with Aunt Hester—sometimes in London, sometimes in Devonshire; but no one but her husband and his aunt ever knew the real history—never knew whom Nellie Forrester was—never knew what became of Leah Lorton; but supposed that Frank had married a nobody in India, who passed as Leah Sylvester.

People began to say Mrs. Max Mowbray was a mystery, but it did not seem to disturb her husband, so they grew true.

She made herself liked by his sisters, and they always enjoyed themselves on their visits to the firm. It was on of these visits Hetty made Sir Frederick Halton's acquaintance, and the following year saw her his wife, much to Lena Saltrum's chagrin, though Sir Frederick could not but think he had lost a prize when he lost Leah Lorton. Leah she was to all—Leah she must remain to the end.

Many years have since come and gone, but Leah remains as beautiful as ever. She was the Leah of old, but her voice is brighter, and the song—her favourite one, "For ever and for ever," is sung with different meaning now.

[THE END.]

AMONG the Germans the badge of a married woman consists of a little cap or hood, of which they are very proud, and "donning the cap" is feature of the wedding-day among the peasants of certain localities. The married women of Little Russia are always seen, even in the hottest weather, with a thick cloth of dark blue twisted about their heads. In every country but Great Britain and the United States there is a sign or symbol of some kind that distinguishes the matron from the spinster.

FACETIE.

"THESE eggs do not seem very fresh," said Mr. Newwed, sniffing. "Nonsense, my dear. They are just out of the store!" said the young wife.

BERTIE: "I'm awfully in love with her, but I wouldn't have her know it for the world." Bertie's Sister: "So she told me."

YOUNG LADY (timorously): "Who was that screaming just now?" Dentist: "Don't be alarmed; it was a patient who was being treated free of charge."

MISS CHATTERS: "Do you believe all the disagreeable things you read in the newspapers?" Miss Gossip: "I do if they're about people I know."

MISS PRION (quoting)—"Wise men make proverbs, and fools repeat them." Miss Smart (musingly)—"Yes; I wonder what wise man made the one you just repeated."

FOND MAMMA: "What! Quarrelling already, and married only a week!" Bride: "Well, boo-hoo—George says I—boo-hoo-hoo—make him happier than he—boo-hoo—makes me."

M'TAVISH: "Hoo faur is't to London!" Cockney: "Ten miles as the crow flies." M'Tavish: "Hoots, toots, man, I'm no gaun to flee. Hoo mony miles is't as the crow waulks!"

FRIEND: "Why so downcast, doctor?" Young Doctor: "A patient whom I began to treat yesterday has just died." Friend: "Oh, don't worry about that! He might have died anyway."

SECRETARY (lunatic asylum): "Mrs. Sharp-tongue was here to-day, and wanted her husband sent home and placed under her care." Superintendent: "Did you let him go?" "No. He said he would rather stay here." "Hum! The man must be sane."

MINOR POET: "Well, have you read my new book?" Candid Friend: "Read it! My dear fellow, I've read it twice." Minor Poet (gushing): "How good of you." Candid Friend: "Not at all. I was only trying to make out what you were driving at."

MRS. BLINKS: "That horrid Mrs. Winks says I'm a fool." Mr. Blinks: "I'm sure she would not make such an ill-natured remark." Mrs. Blinks: "Well, she didn't say that in so many words, but that is what she meant. She says I believe everything you tell me."

"I think, mamma, I must be beginning to look old," said Miss Thirty-five one day. "I'm sure I don't see why you think so, my dear. I heard only to-day Mr. Pendennis tell you how young you were looking." "That's just it. When I was young people didn't say anything about it."

STRUGGLING PASTOR: "Nearly all the congregation have subscribed liberally to the fund, and I feel sure that I also have your hearty co-operation. How much will you—?" Mrs. Leader: "Let me see. Oh, I am the only member who has a carriage, I think!" "Yes, the rest are poor." "Well, I will drive round and collect the subscriptions."

ONE of the passengers on board an ill-fated vessel at the time of the wreck was an exceedingly nervous man. Finding himself floating in the water, he imagined what his friends would do to acquaint his wife with his fate. Saved at last, he rushed to the telegraph office and sent this message: "Dear P., I am saved. Break it gently to my wife."

AT a school not many miles from here, the head-mistress, a Miss Podgett, caught one of her most mischievous scholars writing, instead of grammar, the following lines: "A little mouse ran up the stairs, to hear Miss Podgett say her prayers." She brought him out before the class and said, "I will give you five minutes to make up another two lines, and if you don't do it I shall thrash you." The lad got his wits to work, and just in time he blurted out, "Here I stand before Miss Podgett, She's going to strike, and I'm going to dodge it."

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SOCIETY.

PRINCE CHARLES of Denmark will, it is said, have half a million of money settled upon him on his marriage, his mother having so large a fortune that it could well bear even so liberal a demand upon it, despite the fact that Prince Charles is the second of a family of nine children.

LITTLE Princess Victoria Eugénie of Battenberg is a great favourite with and is most devoted to her august grandmother. It is an exceedingly pretty sight to see the little girl with her Majesty, of whom she is not at all in awe, notwithstanding the fact that even the Queen's own children treat her with a certain degree of formal respect.

WHEN the Prince of Wales alludes to his mother, his Royal Highness always uses the words "My mother the Queen." The Duke of York he always alludes to as "My son the Duke of York." On the continent such simplicity is tabooed; the utterances of the mighty are controlled by strict and formal etiquette.

THE Empress-Dowager of Russia has lately sent her father, the King of Denmark, a ring possessing no ordinary interest. It was worn by Alexander II. on his little finger at the time of his assassination, and his son Alexander III. never removed it from his hand from his accession as Emperor till the day of his death. On account of his strong personal regard for both Emperors the memento is much valued by its present owner.

A CURIOUS fact connected with Prince "Carl" is that he is very superstitious. Of course, Scandinavians are all, more or less, given to take an interest in occult mysteries and the like, and to believe in omens; and so are sailors, and Prince Carl is at once a Scandinavian and a sailor. The young Danish Prince is a firm believer in what is known as spiritualism, and is said himself to be a medium.

THERE is a rule that people cannot send a present direct to the Prince of Wales's family unless they are personal intimates of the Marlborough House family. Public bodies are accustomed to inquire whether Royalty would be willing to accept a present. Tradespeople are accustomed to give a joint present under the title of "warrant-holders." Large trading companies, which are also warrant-holders, sometimes ask for permission to give a separate present, but in that case it must be a costly one.

In the Court circles at Copenhagen it is said that the marriage between Princess Maud and Prince Carl is to take place at the end of May or beginning of June in London, and that the ceremony will be a specially grand one, inasmuch as there will be present most of the members of half the Imperial and Royal Houses of Europe. It is fully expected that the Czar and Czarina will attend, His Imperial Majesty being greatly attached to his two cousins, a feeling frequently displayed during the visits to Fredensborg. It is even rumoured that the German Emperor will put in an appearance, as he is said to have a very special partiality for his first cousin Maud.

WITH the exception of the Queen and the Prince of Wales nearly all the Royalties of Europe have a very praiseworthy, but at the same time exceedingly inconvenient, habit of getting up very early in the day. Thus, the German Emperor is generally about by five in the morning; the Queen Regent of Spain is dressed for the day at seven, although no one else is awake in Madrid before eleven o'clock or noon; the King of Italy's hour of rising is six, as is that of the King of Sweden and King Charles of Roumania; while the late Emperor Dom Pedro of Brazil, when in Europe, was wont to get up at three, and to call upon his friends and acquaintances at the extraordinary hours of four and five in the morning. The Queen alone never rises before eight, while breakfast at Marlborough House and Sandringham is rarely partaken of before ten, the Prince of Wales going to bed late.

STATISTICS.

ABOUT 400,000,000 pounds of soap are used in this country yearly.

As a rule a man's hair turns grey five years sooner than a woman's.

THE small steel screws used in watchmaking are worth six times their weight in gold.

THIRTY-TWO European kings and princes have borne the name of Albert.

THE Odd Fellows in the United States number 696,008, and the Freemasons 695,193.

GEMS.

It takes a wise man to be independent without being stubborn.

HE who hath most of heart knows most of sorrow.

DEATH to the lower self is the nearest gate and the quickest road to life.

SOME things flower invisibly and hide away their fruit under thick foliage. It is often only when the winds shake their leaves down and strip their branches bare that we find the best that has been growing.

ALL that man produces to-day more than his cave-dwelling ancestors he produces by virtue of the accumulated achievements, inventions and improvements of the intervening generations, together with the social and industrial machinery which is their legacy.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RICE BUNS.—Mix two ounces of ground rice with six ounces of flour and one teaspoonful of baking powder, rub in an ounce of fresh butter and two ounces of sifted sugar. Beat up an egg in a quarter of a pint of milk, with a little lemon or any spice flavouring. Have ready small patty pans, well greased, half fill each with cake mixture; put at once into the oven, and bake gently for a quarter of an hour.

SCALLOPED EGGS.—An appetizing way to serve eggs for breakfast is to scallop them according to the following directions:—Boil them hard, chop them not too fine. Line a pudding-dish with a layer of bread or crumbs, then a layer of cold boiled ham, or bits of fried ham chopped fine, then a layer of eggs, and so on till the dish is full. Season the layers with salt, pepper, and little bits of butter. Moisten with a little cream, and set into the oven for ten minutes, or until thoroughly heated.

PERFUMED BUTTER is becoming fashionable at breakfast and tea tables. The butter is made into pats and stamped with a floral design, and is then wrapped in thin cheese cloth, and placed on a bed of roses, violets, or carnations, arranged in a flat bottomed-dish. Over these is placed a layer of flowers, so that the butter patties are imbedded in flowers. They are then placed on ice, where they are allowed to remain for several hours. This butter is eaten with Vienna rolls, accompanied only by a cup of chocolate or delicious mocha.

MIXED PRESERVE.—Two pounds apples, two pounds pears, two pounds plums, and six pounds sugar. Pare and slice the apples and pears, taking out the cores; skin and split the plums, and remove the stones. Put some apples in the bottom of a stone jar that will go into the oven, then a layer of plums, then of pears, and repeat until they are all used up; cover the jar tightly, and put it in a slow oven, and leave them there till the fruit is all quite tender. It is best to leave them all night in the oven. Put the whole of the fruit and the sugar into the preserving pan, stir till it boils, and boil about half an hour till it is quite thick. It is cut in slices when cold and served.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE black ostrich stands seven feet high.

IN India and Persia sheep are used as beasts of burden.

HOLLOW steel spheres are in use in Sweden for billiard balls.

IT is said that salmon, pike, and gold fish are the only fish that never sleep.

A HUNGARIAN has discovered a method of spinning wood pulp into yarn, so that it can be woven into a fabric that may be converted into various articles of clothing.

A POT that cannot boil over has been invented by a Berlin machinist. It has a perforated rim, through which the overflowing fluid returns to the pot.

THE Emperor of Russia has invited Prince Nicholas of Greece to visit St. Petersburg, and he may possibly go there on leaving England, instead of returning to Athens.

CAPE HORN is one mass of black rock, without vegetation or birds. The sea always runs off it with tremendous force, and rounding the Cape is considered by sailors one of the roughest passages there is.

A FRENCH engineer has conceived the interesting idea of reproducing the house in which Napoleon lived at St. Helena as an attraction during the Exhibition of 1900. The house will be an exact copy of the original, surrounded by panoramic canvases representing the natural surroundings.

AN electric smoking table is the latest fashion. It is lighted by electricity, provided with an electric cigar lighter, an electric bell, a silver-lined cigar box, with a musical roller, a patent molsener, two ash trays, a cigar cutter, a tower clock, and an electric lighthouse thermometer, hydrometer, and barometer.

MANY people in Australia are now using bicycles for quite a novel purpose. In some districts the kangaroos do much mischief, and the local authorities pay "scalp money" for all heads secured by hunters. A large number of bicycles are used in the chase. Armed with rifles, the shooters are able to encircle the escaping flock, and can bring down many a kangaroo by their noiseless approach.

THE latest hygienic craze in Paris is the use of porous glass for windows. This is declared to possess all the advantages of the ordinary window-framing; and, while light is as freely admitted as through the medium of common glass, the "porous" further admits air, too, the minute holes with which it is intersected being too fine to permit of any draught, while they provide a healthy, continuous ventilation through the apartment.

POLYXENIA is probably the only place in the world where the marriage feast takes place without the presence of the bridegroom. For some unexplained reason the young man is "sent into the bush" when negotiations are opened with the family of his bride, and he remains there during the subsequent festivities. It is only when the guests have departed and the girl is left alone with her parents that messengers are despatched for him.

THE process pursued in Germany by manufacturers of varicoloured wood-pulp mosaics is said to give the most perfect results in that beautiful art. Among the most important features is that of placing the moist pulp into heated mosaic moulds of the desired shape and size, and in these forms it is placed under the press. As a result of the heat the shellac in the mixture softens, regaining its adhesive powers, and the curd cement hardens rapidly, so that both of the substances, the shellac as well as the cement, unite under the pressure so entirely with the wood particles that the resulting wood mass may within a few minutes be taken out of the moulds without losing the form received. After the cooling process and complete hardening these mosaics, it is claimed, are far less susceptible to any change of temperature or to moisture than any of the natural woods.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

K. Y.—You must give them up at once.

S. K.—You should complain to the police.

QUESTIONER.—You will be liable to contribute.

HOUSEWIFE.—A cake is best to be cold when food.

INJURED.—Every club has a right to make its own rules.

INFORMANT.—International means between or among nations.

OLD READER.—She is not entitled to separate maintenance.

LANCE.—It would require a good-sized volume to give full details.

B. A.—Offer them to a dealer or collector; there is no fixed price.

CRICK.—No recruits taken in this country for Cape Mounted Police.

M. S.—You are only liable from the date of her accepting you as tenant.

ANTHUR.—There is only one way; search until you find purchasers.

EDWIN.—It is a part of the bridegroom's duty to procure the wedding ring.

DOUBTFUL.—Such knotty points are left to be arranged by parents or guardians.

C. S.—Your best plan would be to engage some one resident in the colony to make inquiry.

HENRIETTA.—Your best course will be to write to the nearest large hospital and ask for full particulars.

SEN.—Do not leave a situation of eighteen shillings a week on the mere chance of obtaining a better one.

PALE FACE.—We are not aware of any preparation beside rouge for giving a fictitious colour to the cheeks.

MAG.—There are dozens of excellent books on the subject; we cannot undertake to say which is the best.

D. F.—There are electric needles advertised; but we are not prepared to express an opinion as to their merits.

L. F.—We cannot settle the matter in dispute, which is purely one of taste, and about which there may be two opinions.

REGULAR READER.—You had better get a book; the necessary directions would occupy far more space than we can afford.

EDGAR C.—If you use tobacco in any form you must give it up at once, or run the risk of making yourself an invalid for life.

IDA.—Send it to the dyer if you want it done as they do it. You certainly could not accomplish it, not having their appliances.

YOUTHFUL HOSTESS.—It is perfectly proper to indicate the day on which a visitor would be welcome, and also the length of the visit.

ROSEB.—The largest pyramid covers twelve acres of ground, is 416 feet high and the platform on the summit is thirty-two feet square.

BAB.—Whisk an egg into froth in a bowl with a fork; pour on a cup of hot, but not boiling, milk; add a pinch of sugar, and drink as quickly as possible.

C. B.—An auctioneer is not obliged to proceed with the sale of an article if he sees he is not going to get something like its approximate value for it.

AMBITIOUS.—The only way of getting your comedy produced is by forwarding it to some manager of a theatre for which you might think it most adapted.

H. A.—Your master is bound to teach you the trade to which you are apprenticed; in default of doing so, he can be made to refund the money paid as premium.

NOT QUITE SURE.—Only put three lemons and only four breakfast cups of water, and use the skins of only three-quarters of the oranges; in every other way the same.

B. B.—A married man is not liable for debts contracted by his wife before marriage. If she has any goods or property of her own execution may be levied on them.

N. C.—It is much better to get some professional florist to plant them for you. Palms are exceedingly delicate when young, and will not bear sudden changes of temperature.

RODIE.—Rest assured there is nothing will make your snouts grow faster and stronger than shaving daily, if need be; persevere, and have patience; you will be rewarded.

DISTRACTED.—A deserter's punishment depends upon his previous character and the court-martial before whom he is tried; they may sentence him to any term of imprisonment they think fit.

B. A. C.—If his intentions be honourable, and his position in society such as to warrant him making advances which may with propriety be encouraged, then no secrecy on his part is necessary.

CONSTANT READER.—His conduct to her he prefers should be such as to bespeak ulterior intentions of a serious nature; whilst to the other sister he should behave himself with politeness but reserve.

EDIE.—There are several ways to remove hair, but they are either slow and painful or troublesome. Pulling the hair out by the roots is said to be effectual, but sometimes the root is not all removed and the hair grows again.

S. G.—Clip short with scissors, then take a bit of pumice stone, dip it in water, and rub the place when the hair begins to sprout again; by a little perseverance they will be split and uprooted; do a little at a time, and take care not to break skin.

NELL.—There are many causes for the loss of hair. There may be some disease of the scalp, or a constitutional weakness or lack of vitality. Without knowing something about your physical condition it is impossible to give a definite answer.

K. C. G.—Knights of the Garter wear the emblem of the Order on their left leg. The Queen wears the riband over her shoulders and across her breast, and a bracelet on the left arm with the motto and devices of the Order.

NOVICE.—One quart of fruit, one pint of water, three-quarters of a pound of sugar. Cover with squares of light biscuit dough, and boil together fifteen minutes. Eat with sauce or nutmeg and cream. Use a porcelain-lined kettle.

ECONOMY.—It is not necessary, if your means will not admit of it, to adopt in every particular the style of dress which is the most conspicuous. There is a conservatism in fashion, as well as in politics, and while you dress fashionably you need not array yourself extravagantly.

BETSY.—One pound wheaten meal, quarter pound flour, one teaspoon baking soda, half teaspoon tartaric acid, half teaspoon salt, one dessert spoon butter. Rub the butter in among all the dry things and make into a dough with buttermilk. Roll out the desired thickness and cook either on the griddle or the oven.

THE END OF THE WORLD.

Don't you remember when you and I,
Once in the golden July weather,
Made up our very small minds to try
To walk to the end of the world together?
You were just three, and I was five—
How we danced through the sweet red clover,
Surely the happiest pair alive—
Telling each other over and over,
"Maud, you're a little fairy queen!"
"Jack, you're a prince with a cap and feather!"
We won't come back to tell what we've seen
Till we find the end of the world together."

A score of years have passed since then,
Bringing the storm and the sunning weather;
What would you think should I ask again,
Shall we walk to the end of the world together?
Borne on the wings of the summer air,
Comes a breath of the same sweet clover;
Your soul looks out of your face so fair,
And my heart is singing over and over,
"I am the prince and you are my queen!"
Then look in the future and answer whether,
Through every possible changing scene,
We may walk to the end of the world together."

M. A. N.

FATIMA.—Take equal quantities of white of egg and water, beat them together, and sprinkle in as much fine slaked lime as will make the whole up to the consistency of a thin paste. The cement hardens very quickly, and must be used as soon as it is made. There are many others for the same purpose, but the above is one of the best and simplest when well done.

AN UNHAPPY READER.—You should be the best judge of the way of overcoming them. It is unfortunate that your affianced has not the means to warrant a speedy marriage. You are both wise in deferring the wedding-day to some time in the future, and this being acknowledged, why worry over the delay attending it? Do not give way to despondency.

JANE ANNIE.—Boil the skins of two lemons until very tender; then beat them very fine; next beat half a pound of the best almonds in rose-water, and a pound of sugar very fine; melt half a pound of butter and let it stand until quite cold; beat the yolks of eight eggs, and the whites of four eggs, mix them and beat them all together with a little orange water, then bake in the oven.

SUNLIGHT.—Perhaps the best way is to wet the linen in strong soapuds, then make a mixture of soap and salt and put it upon the spots. Lay the goods in the bright sunlight and allow them to remain out for several days, sprinkling them with soapuds to keep them damp. Some stains may be washed out by rubbing them with fresh lard, and leaving them undisturbed for twenty-four hours, when the stain and grease will wash out together.

RECREATION.—Croquet and other games owe their origin to the desire of humanity to be amused. In olden times kings and rulers demanded entertainment, and the people made great efforts to devise something that would please them. Sometimes a man who invented a new game or any novel form of entertainment received honours and wealth from the ruling powers, therefore it became a habit to study out and invent whatever might seem to afford the means of delighting the minds of royalty and at the same time fill the pockets of the inventor. Croquet is said to be a sort of revamping of one of the games of the ancients.

OF AN INQUIRING MIND.—The story goes that in an old-time English tavern a receptacle for small coin was placed in a conspicuous place over which appeared the legend, "To insure promptness." Whatever was placed in the box was given to the servants. Other taverns followed the example, and soon the three words were written "T. I. P.," everybody knowing what they indicated. Then the punctuation marks were dropped and the word tip was born.

NITA.—People are very willing to attribute to their unfortunate situations many things that are really the fault of their indifference, ill temper or bad dispositions. As a general thing, however, those who themselves feel the need of the luxuries of life and can only enjoy them to a limited degree, are more capable of sympathising with their fellows who are similarly situated. Those who have never experienced the pinchings of poverty can have but little appreciation of its discomforts.

DUMPLING.—Pick some rice and cleanse it by rubbing it well in a towel. It must not be wet, or it will not adhere to the fruit. If apples are used, core and leave them whole. Dip each one in water and roll it on the rice. A piece of lemon peel, or a clove, may be placed in the centre of each apple. Each dumpling must be tied in a separate cloth, and boiled until the rice becomes soft. These dumplings are good for those who cannot eat boiled paste, and have before been recommended and approved of. We trust that you will like this recipe as well as any other you have found in this department.

MISS GILMOUR.—If, before the stain dried, you rinsed the spot in cold water, to which a few drops of aqua ammonia had been added, it would be removed at once. For the dried stains damp the place well with cold water, then apply to the stains a weak solution of salts of sorrel or hypochlorite of soda, and then rinse in abundance of cold water. Some fruit stains are hard to get rid of. A good plan is to well smear the spots with wet soap, lay the article out on the grass, and sprinkle common salt over the stains, and keep the places wet by constantly sprinkling water over them from time to time. Two or three hours of this treatment is usually sufficient, then wash the whole in the usual way.

GIR.—The word "fad" is possibly derived from the Welsh language. By the law of mutation of initial consonants peculiar to that tongue the root words fadd and modd are convertible terms. Their essential meaning is possession; transitive or intransitive, possession of something, or the act of being possessed or engrossed by some occupation or vice. The word modd is not common in Teutonic idioms, so that the Anglo-Saxons probably borrowed it from the Welsh. Fad is, therefore, equally derivable from fadd. Proximately, of course, it comes from the Midland dialects, and ultimately from some root word common to many members of the Aryan family of speech.

K. B.—Take half a bushel of good unslaked lime, slake it with boiling water, covering it during the process to keep in the steam. Strain the liquid through a fine sieve or strainer, and add to it a peck of clean salt previously well dissolved in warm water; three pounds of ground rice, boiled to a thin paste, and stirred in boiling hot; half a pound of powdered Spanish whiting, and one pound of clean glue, which has been previously dissolved by first soaking it well. Then hang the mixture over a slow fire in a small kettle within another kettle of water. Add five gallons of water to the whole mixture, stir it well, and let it stand for a few days, protected from dirt. The whitewash should be put on quite hot. It can be kept in a kettle on a portable furnace.

PERPLEXED.—Hundred was an old Saxon term for a certain number of families comprised in a township, hence the Olden Hundred were just the townships in a district of Buckinghamshire near to the New Forest, which in ancient times was infested with robbers; to put these down a steward was appointed over the Hundreds with something like regal power; he could hang at pleasure, and in the execution of his elastic powers he quickly got rid of the robbers; but the office has been retained although there is now no work for the steward to do; a yearly salary of twenty-five shillings attaches to it; that makes it an office of profit under the Crown, which on being accepted by any man compels him to go to his constituents for reelection; he does not do so; the attention of the Speaker is drawn to the fact that his place in the Commons is vacant, and a writ is thereupon issued for the election of one in his stead.

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